



2026 - 2027

FAMILY PLAYBOOK

FIND YOUR CALLING | CHANGE THE WORLD



WELCOME

to the first steps in your Hero's Journey...

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FAST FACTS

TO REFERENCE

MASCOT :	Heroes
ADDRESS :	1039 Broad St. Rd, Manakin-Sabot, VA 23103
PARENT PORTAL:	www.actonacademywestend.com/parent-portal
INSTAGRAM :	@actonacademywestend
FACEBOOK :	https://www.facebook.com/actonacademywestend
ACTON “BAND” APP: REQUIRED BY PARENTS	Parent Bands to Join: <u>EQUIP (required), INSPIRE , CONNECT</u> Studio Bands: <u>SPARKS</u> <u>DISCOVERY</u> (Current) Sparks Studio (Current) Discovery Studio (Current) Odyssey Studio (soft-launch) Adventure Studio (Future) Launchpad Studio
STUDIO NAMES:	
CONTACT INFO :	info@actonacademywestend.com guide@actonacademywestend.com
GUIDES:	Sparks- Rachel Johnstone sparkstudio@actonacademywestend.com Discovery - Whitney Hull discoverystudio@actonacademywestend.com Odyssey- Zach Johnstone odysseystudio@actonacademywestend.com Part Time Guide- Callie DeKuester connect@actonacademywestend.com
HEAD OF SCHOOL:	Michael Alsop michael@actonacademywestend.com
OWNERS/ FOUNDERS:	Michael Alsop michael@actonacademywestend.com Katelyn Alsop katelyn@actonacademywestend.com Joe Malizia joe@actonacademywestend.com Emily Malizia emily@actonacademywestend.com

IMPORTANT DATES

PARENT BOOT CAMP!
SATURDAY AUGUST 22ND 9AM-2PM

POP IN - BACK TO SCHOOL
THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 3RD 2-3PM

SCHOOL-WIDE FALL FEST SEPTEMBER 11TH (TBD)

SCHOOL-WIDE CAMPOUT OCTOBER 2ND-4TH



KEY ELEMENTS TO KNOW

HERO/EAGLE/LEARNER

These terms can be used interchangeably. We prefer to use these terms instead of “children” or “student,” because we are all students on a learning journey.

HERO’S JOURNEY

We believe each of our students will find a passion – something they love and are uniquely gifted to do – finding and pursuing this gift is what we call the Hero’s Journey.

LEARNER–LED

Acton Academy is Learner-Led, which means that our students are involved in every step of decision making processes from studio rules, scheduling, school systems, and even disciplinary actions. Age appropriate freedoms, within reason, are given to students. They are responsible for setting their own goals, tracking their progress, navigating relationships, and reflecting on their experiences.

GUIDE

Acton employs Guides rather than teachers. A Guide’s role is not to be an expert but to help lead the learner to their own conclusions. Guides provide instruction with the goal for learners to eventually become intrinsically motivated and independent. We desire our learners to not have a “sage on a stage” but rather a “Guide on the side” who is coaching them into each season of growth.

STUDIO

We refer to our classrooms as studios to encourage the idea of an environment of creation and personal expression.

TRIBE

We are very intentional about building trust and deep friendships between all of the Heroes in a given studio. We refer to them as a “tribe” because of this level of intimacy and vulnerability that is required to truly belong to the team.

KEY ELEMENTS TO KNOW

CORE SKILLS

Reading, writing, and math are the foundational academic subjects that all Heroes work on individually and at their own pace. Core skills will be completed through hands on learning and online programs/software.

QUEST

A quest is roughly equivalent to a unit in project based learning. It represents a significant amount of work with a team and a high level of mastery to complete. *Introduced in Discovery Studio*

JOURNEY TRACKER

The proprietary Learning Management System (LMS) built by and for the Acton network. Think of it like an Hero's educational plan, calendar, and record of work. *Introduced in the Discovery Studio*

LAUNCH

A Socratic conversation that is geared toward exploring deep and meaningful concepts or challenges. Every school day begins and ends with a “launch.”

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION

A formal discussion based on a defined concept or question that requires participants to clearly articulate their positions or arguments. A leader's role in a socratic discussion is to ask open ended questions that will help the participants lean into deeper and deeper understanding.

JOURNEY MEETINGS

After each session, parents will be offered what we call a Journey Meeting. These meetings are an opportunity for the learner to share with their parents about the their growth , the goals they accomplished this session, and the goals they want to set for next session. If you desire a meeting with a guide and your learner we will need to set up another time, but the goal is for these meetings to remain learner led.

introducing THE PLAYBOOK

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PLAYBOOK:

- 1) Offer your family a valuable resource to return to when you have questions about how/why we do things a certain way.
- 2) Clarify how we play this game and clarify the agreements that we make as we play together. These agreements are contained in the contracts that are made between learners, parents, guides & owners.
- 3) Offer a condensed overview of “The Rules of Acton”--or the guiding principles that allow everyone that plays to get the most out of their Acton experience.



HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK:

- 1) Read it. Refer back to it. Hold US accountable.
- 2) Often when you ask us a question, we will refer you back to this playbook. Why? It's the Acton Way!
- 3) The “Acton Way” is designed to empower heroes (parents are heroes too!) with choice and trust as they navigate and ignite their life journey.

THE RULES

WHY THE RULES NEED TO BE SO CLEAR

THE "ACTON WAY" IS BEST THOUGHT OF AS A GAME

This is our favorite analogy to help illustrate why the rules of this Acton game must be clear to all of the families and learners who join the community.

imagine...

you are playing a game of soccer and someone comes in and starts to use their hands to play.



are you still playing soccer at that point?

Perhaps it's handball or just a fun game, but if people continue to play with their hands, it is no longer soccer.



ACTON IS DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

Acton looks and feels unlike any other school experience. By clearly outlining how we play together, and creating agreements with one another, we can best serve your family and deliver on our promises to you.

THE RULES

BASIC RULES OF PLAY

All players work together to build a powerful learning community. Together, this community upholds the mission of Acton Academy West End (see Mission on the next page).

In order to play the game together effectively, each player (parents, learners, guides, owners) must agree to the following basic rules of play.

RULES OF PLAY:

- > I will intentionally grow
- > I will take responsibility for my learning ALWAYS
- > I will practice Servant Leadership
- > I will contribute to and build the community
- > I will hold peers accountable & welcome the same
- > I will uphold Socratic Learning/Guiding at Acton
- > I will strive for excellence through hard work & I welcome feedback
- > I will use technology with purpose and focus
- > I will work to purposefully build my family culture

NOTE: If any player does not agree to the BASIC RULES OF PLAY, this may be an indication that this is not the game for them.

NON-DISCRIMINATORY POLICY

ACTON ACADEMY WEST END ENROLLS QUALIFIED STUDENTS OF ANY RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN, SEX, AGE, RELIGION, MENTAL OR PHYSICAL DISABILITY TO ALL THE RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES, PROGRAMS, AND ACTIVITIES GENERALLY ACCORDED OR MADE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS. CONSISTENT WITH ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE LAW, ACTON ACADEMY WEST END PROHIBITS UNLAWFUL DISCRIMINATION ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN, SEX, AGE, MENTAL OR PHYSICAL DISABILITY, RELIGION, OR ANY OTHER CHARACTERISTIC PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SCHOOL'S PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES.

THE MISSION

TO INSPIRE EACH PERSON WHO ENTERS OUR DOORS TO FIND A CALLING AND CHANGE THE WORLD

OUR MISSION IS TWO-FOLD:

1. We are a school that empowers families to GROW... AND GROW TOGETHER.
 - Foundations & attitudes toward education happen first (and most powerfully) in the family.
 - Empowering families empowers children to fully experience meaningful education.
2. Prepare learners to hear a call to adventure, start a Hero's Journey and ultimately FIND A CALLING & CHANGE THE WORLD.
 - Empowered Acton heroes and families learn to intentionally grow and contribute powerfully to society. This is what education is all about at Acton Academy West End.

OUR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY:

We believe clear thinking leads to good decisions, good decisions lead to right habits, the right habits forge character, and character determines destiny. We are a school that empowers families to GROW... AND GROW TOGETHER.

OUR ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY:

We believe self-directed, peer-to-peer learner-driven communities built by our young Heroes will deliver transformational learning at a cost all parents can afford.

OUR CORE BELIEFS:

01. We believe each child has a gift that can change the world in a profound way
02. We believe in a closely connected family of learners
03. We believe in learning to learn, learning to do, and learning to be
04. We believe in economic, religious, and political freedom

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF OPERATIONS

There are three underlying values that drive every policy and system created for our community to function and achieve our mission:

01. Freedom for families. We believe parents, not schools, are in charge of their families and trust you to make your own choices for your families.
02. Sanctity of studios as learning spaces for Heroes only. This includes basic safety as well as protection against interruptions, distractions and the threat of lowering standards of excellence.
03. Sanctity of parent/child relationships: We will not come between you and your child.

OWNERS PROMISES TO OUR LEARNERS:

01. To begin a Hero's Journey, preparing young people to live exceptional lives in the real world.

02. Learning to be curious, independent, lifelong learners

03. Encourage the discovery of gifts and learn to use them to solve difficult problems and serve others

04. Develop a deep respect for economic, political, and religious freedoms

05. Empowering them to cherish the arts and the wonders of the world

06. Understand the importance of strong character and critical thinking

COMPONENTS

OF THE GAME



LEARNING TO LEARN

processes

Learning to LEARN means finding the recipes, processes, and algorithms that help us make better decisions and more deeply embed the right habits of critical thinking.

- Goal Setting
- Time Management
- Reflecting
- Learning Through Play

LEARNING TO DO

skills & academics

Learning to DO means making practical decisions in the real world to accomplish great tasks, as a way to change the world.

- Apprenticeships
- Personal & Business Budgeting
- Product / Invention Demonstrations
- Hands-on Discovery of the World

LEARNING TO BE

character & growth

We want heroes near the end of a successful, satisfying and fulfilling life to have answers to three important questions:

- Did I contribute something meaningful?
- Was I a good person?
- Who did I love and who loved me?

The final “learning to be” promise means finding ways through difficult challenges and decisions to deeply etch habits of positive character traits into each soul, while rubbing away the negative habits that take away from who we are destined to become, if we want to reach our full potential.

THE PLAYERS

TOGETHER WE MAKE A POWERFUL TEAM



ACTON PARENTS



ACTON HEROES



ACTON GUIDES

Everyone in the Acton Game is a hero that takes on a different role to support and accomplish the Mission and Vision of Acton Academy West End. Each player will do their best to uphold their role. To be certain that each player fully understands their role, they are outlined and agreed to through a series of contracts/covenants. This way, all players understand their role and can clearly see the role of other players as well. Players will sign their covenants during session one.

The purpose of this living document is not to promote rule-following or bureaucracy but rather the opposite: to draw clear guardrails to encourage innovation between children, parents and Guides, who through commitment and action show support for the creation of a world-class academy. Heroes sign their own contracts each year and will establish rules of engagement under which learning in the studio will flourish.

WHAT IS A HERO?

- We believe each person has a gift that can change the world in a profound way.
- A hero has the courage to try things they aren't yet good at.
- Learns from failure.
- Gets up every time they get knocked down.

THE HERO MINDSET

- Welcomes challenges and embraces responsibility.
- Strives for and celebrates excellence.
- Praises heroic choices by others, practices frequent acts of kindness and holds firm boundaries in relationships.
- Is grateful and generous.

OUR PROMISES TO EACH OTHER 👉

HERO CONTRACT

HERO PROMISES TO GUIDES & PARENTS

As a Hero, I promise to:

HOLD STUDIO SACRED

- Treat the studio like a sacred space.
- Do my part to care for the studio and outside space.
- Leave spaces better than when I found them.

BE KIND & RESPECTFUL

- Speak only with kindness, encouragement, and truth.
- Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- Be a loyal, selfless and kind friend to all.
- Make courageous choices and keep my promises

MINIMIZE DISTRACTION

- Never distract yourself or others.
- Work hard and play hard.
- Do my best to uphold the Basic Rules of the Acton Game

If I fail to deliver on these promises, I understand that guides may change the Studio incentives, or I may suffer natural consequences, which will be laid out in advance. These may include being separated from the Studio, being asked to stay home for some period of time or even being asked to leave Acton Academy West End.

Hero's Name

Date

GUIDE CONTRACT

GUIDE PROMISES TO OWNERS & LEARNERS

As a Guide, I promise to:

- Deliver on Acton Academy's promises to heroes and parents.
- Provide challenges, milestones, rewards, and guardrails to inspire and equip each of our heroes.
- Present processes, frameworks, examples, recipes, and hard questions for heroes to use.
- Allow heroes to learn from failure and natural consequences, when necessary.
- Be committed to being on my own Hero's Journey
- Hold up a mirror so heroes can see themselves (and their impact) and insist they live up to the promises they have made to themselves, each other, their parents, and guides.
- Affirm heroes' gifts, listen to them, and praise their effort, especially when the path is difficult. Celebrate as you take on more and more of a guide's responsibilities as you move from being an Independent Learner to Running Partner, Socratic Leader, Project Leader, and Organization Leader.
- If I fail to deliver on these promises, I invite heroes to comment on the surveys, which are taken very seriously by all guides and the founders of the school. Guides who continually fail to uphold these promises will no longer be allowed to serve at Acton Academy West End.

Guide's Name

Date

FIELD OF PLAY

STUDIO ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW

How the game is played depends on the Studio in which you are playing. Each Studio fulfills our mission in distinct ways and has its own contract (created and signed by the Heroes during Session 1).

SPARKS STUDIO (generally ages 5-7)

Guiding Belief:

Play is the important work of the child.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice a sense of right and wrong with a foundation in learning to be a good friend. Learn to be part of a community with a focus on collaboration, conflict resolution, curiosity, and creation.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Exploration of the natural world, Strong Reading Foundation, Develop a real-world math sense through manipulatives and game play.

Most learning in Sparks Studio happens through play.



Guiding Belief:

Exciting challenges foster curiosity and encourage a child to dig deeper.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice stewardship of self, space, and time. Learn to more fully consider others and their ideas & needs. Goal setting and maintaining a growth mindset.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Project-based exploration in reading, writing, math, and art that encourages natural love of learning.

DISCOVERY STUDIO (generally ages 7-9)



Guiding Belief:

Exciting challenges foster curiosity and encourage a child to dig deeper.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice stewardship of self, space, and time. Learn to more fully consider others and their ideas & needs. Expanding on Goal setting and maintaining a growth mindset.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Project-based exploration in reading, writing, math, and art that encourages natural love of learning. Mastering Level 3 -5. More indepth Quest Challenges.

(SOFT-LAUNCHING FALL 2026)
ADVENTURE STUDIO
(generally ages 11-14)

Guiding Belief:

Love of learning must be protected through a delicate balance of challenge and choice. Too many requirements kill the love of learning, too little challenge or expectation kills love of learning and undermines growth. Work Hard. Play Hard.

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Develop and practice curiosity, working hard & playing hard, setting goals, identifying & celebrating failures quickly, conflict management, and independence with a keen awareness of building community.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Project-based exploration in all subjects, while taking on more structured problem solving in math, and challenges in reading & writing. Increased responsibility for higher levels of rigor and time management in writing and problem solving (math). Increased focus on assimilating knowledge from powerful books, history, and science through discussion & self reflection. Increased focus level (for longer periods of time) is gained by alternating work with intermittent breaks for movement and collaboration. Hard work leads to the opportunity for fun group activities.

Guiding Belief:

Preparing to launch. Head's down (get to work) & Head's Up (Servant Leadership).

Character Focus (Learning To Be):

Self-discovery & personal gifts, servant leadership, high-level morality, habits of personal success.

Academic Focus (Learning To Learn & Do):

Critical thinking, conceptual mastery of all high school core subjects, clear written & spoken communication through practice and repetition. Making meaningful connections between the work of learning and real life experiences. Pressing deep into areas of passion or calling. Heroes will secure and complete apprenticeships, work together on large, long term world-changing adventures, prepare a professional portfolio, and complete all other requirements necessary for entrance into the college or career of their choice.

(not yet available)
LAUNCHPAD
(generally ages 14-18)

GAME SETUP

DAILY LIFE AT ACTON

WHAT TO BRING

- WATER BOTTLE
- LUNCH
- SNACKS
- BOOK (optional)
- CHANGE OF CLOTHES (in a labeled ziplock)

DROP-OFF

8:15 TO 8:30 AM

Please enter the parking lot and immediately turn left, go around the island joining the drop off/pickup loop. There will be 4 designated spots in front of Studio A + B. Diagram on next page. *Discovery Studio starts promptly at 8:30am, if possible please drop off discovery learners closer to 8:15am.

If an Hero is chronically late, it will impact the quality of his or her learning journey at Acton as well as the culture of the studio community. For this reason, being on time is part of our contract with each other. In the rare case this occurs, we will contact you to discuss a plan to support your family being fully onboard with this commitment.

WARM UP

15-30 MINUTES FREE TIME

All learners should have their belongings put away and be sitting at the circle for morning launch.

GAME BEGINS

8:30-8:45 AM

The day begins with a challenge or launch that invites learners to think through a particular topic or skill and sets them up for the rest of the day.

PICK UP

3:15 PM

The parking lot will be open at 3pm so you can pull in and wait for your learner. Your child should be confident and knowledgeable about the people who are allowed to drive him or her home. This is not a guide's nor Acton's responsibility. It is a family responsibility. If your child is ever confused by who is there at pick up, he or she should immediately ask a guide. A HERO MUST NOT LEAVE CAMPUS WITHOUT CONFIRMED ACKNOWLEDGMENT BETWEEN THE PARENT AND THE GUIDE.

If you are picking up your child at any time other than dismissal :

Parent's Role:

- Text Guides at 804-657-4773
- If you don't have a response from the guides by the time you are picking up, we kindly ask that you ring the doorbell and confirm you are picking up your hero.

Hero's Role:

- Notifies guide of the departure time in the morning when they arrive.
- Hero notifies guide that their parent has arrived and they are leaving.

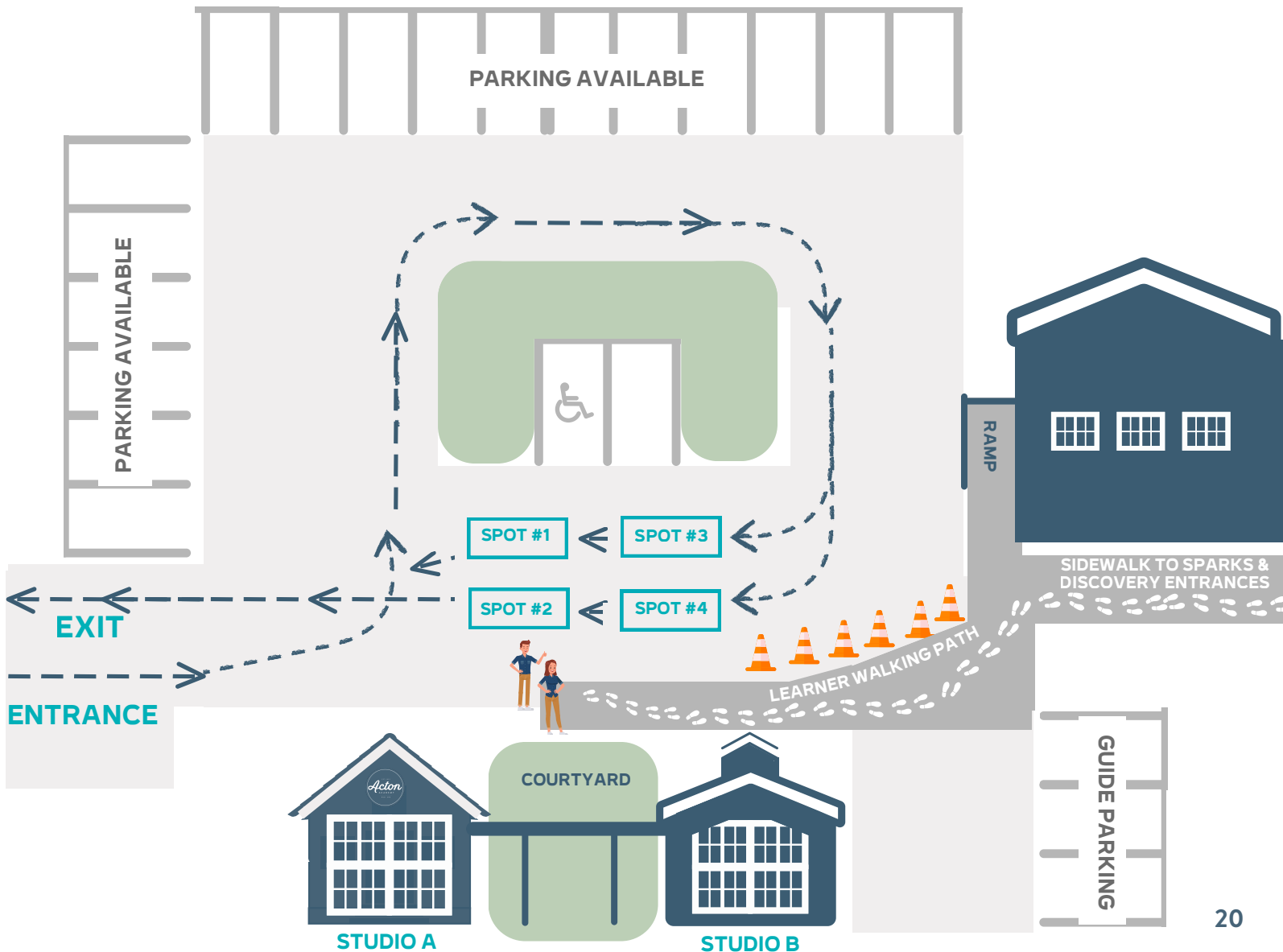
If you are more than 15 minutes late (3:30 or later) for three or more occasions, in an academic year you will be issued a charge of \$25 for each late pickup

DROP OFF 8:15–8:30 AM
PICK UP 3:15 PM

OPTIONS:

LOOP: *Preferred option* Parents are encouraged to follow the loop outlined below to drop off/pick up their learner in front of their studio. Please pull around the island to one of the 4 designated spots in front of Studio A + B.

PARKING: For the first week of school, new parents can park and walk with their learner to the exterior door of the studio. Goodbyes should happen at the door please. Beyond the first week, please use the loop option for drop off. For pick up, when the weather is nice, feel free to park, come collect your learner and then play outside and connect with other parents.



GAME SETUP

DAILY SCHEDULE SAMPLES

SPARKS STUDIO
8:15-8:30 AM
drop-off / free time
8:45-9:15 AM
team challenge
9:15-9:30 AM
launch circle
9:30-10:30AM
core skills/project work
10:30-11:00AM
lunch
11:00AM-12:30PM
outside free time
12:45-1:15PM
DEAR time
1:15-1:30PM
afternoon circle/game
1:30-2:15PM
spark play
2:15-2:30PM
studio maintenance
2:30-3:00 PM
chapter book reading & closing circle
3:00-3:15PM
goals & packing up
3:20PM
pick up

DISCOVERY / ODYSSEY STUDIOS
8:15-8:30 AM
drop-off / free time
8:30-9:00 AM
launch discussion/team challenge Town Hall on Fridays
9:00-11:00AM
quest (M,W,F) & art/civilization/DEAR time (T, Th) (Hands-on, project-based work, team-based challenges, history story reading & discussion)
11:00-11:30AM
lunch
11:30-12:30PM
outside free time
12:45-1:45PM
core skills (individual) & squad meetings (Monday & Friday) (Goal setting, math, reading, grammar, language, gamified learning)
1:45-2:00PM
mindfulness break (Time to rest, play games together, practice mindfulness through yoga & breathing and/or work on projects)
2:00-2:30PM
core skills (collaborative)/ DEAR time (Our time to ask peers questions, work on writing projects together, or work on Waseca)
2:30-2:45PM
studio maintenance
2:45-3:00PM
closing group
3:20 PM
pick-up

GAME SETUP

TUITION & CO-OP VS. PRIVATE

2026-2027 TUITION : \$11,400 annually (12 monthly installments of \$950)

You will receive a monthly invoice to your email address 3 days prior to the first of the month from our tuition system TUIO. Tuition payments are due the 1st of each month. Any payment received after the 5th of the month will include a \$15 late fee. It is possible to pay invoices online via credit/debit card or bank account transfers. A service/processing fee of only \$1.50 will apply to bank account transfers. Credit Card transactions will incur a service/processing fee of \$2.25 + 3%. If your family is exited from Acton during the year, no tuition refund will be issued.

WHY ARE WE A CO-OP INSTEAD OF A PRIVATE ACADEMY?

At Acton Academy, we have done extensive research about the pros and cons of being viewed as a private school or a homeschool co-op by the state of Virginia.

While being viewed as a private school by the state seems more prestigious, we have always come back to the heart of what we love about the Acton model and that is the freedom that it allows for our children in their educational journey.

Private schools can be expected to follow mandates and protocols set by the state. For example, private school models have more restrictions on attendance. Families that would like to take their children out of the studio and work remotely on family trips would have more flexibility under a homeschool co-op model.

This decision does not change the Acton structure or approach to education, it simply allows Acton Academy to thrive and be unhindered.

Parents will need to download, complete and send a "notice of intent" form by August 15th to send to the Superintendent of public schools in your county. (some counties allow it to be sent via email others require it to be mailed)

GAME SETUP

TECHNOLOGY

As the world is more and more digitally connected, people are also more and more attached to their devices. At Acton Academy West End, we hope to promote balance.

ACTON ELECTRONIC POLICY

All materials used at Acton are to enhance education and not for entertainment purposes. This is the standard that will be upheld (and returned to) when there is a question. AAWE is a cell phone, video game, and recreational video viewing FREE campus.

This standard is set & upheld based on much thought, testing, and research. In the words of a seasoned Acton owner, “[The use of video games and YouTube at school] simply drains the energy from the studio.” We feel confident that in upholding this ideal we are taking a step towards improving the safety and health of our sacred learning environment.

ELECTRONIC RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. Heroes are encouraged to not post anything they wouldn't want friends, parents, guides, or a future employer to see.
2. Follow the school's code of conduct when writing online. It is acceptable to disagree with someone else's opinions; however, do it in a respectful way. Make sure that criticism is constructive and not hurtful. What is inappropriate in the studio is inappropriate online.
3. Be safe online. Never give out personal information, including, but not limited to, last names, phone numbers, addresses, exact birthdates, and pictures. Do not share your password with anyone besides your guides and parents.
4. Linking to other websites to support your thoughts and ideas is recommended. However, be sure to read the entire article prior to linking to ensure that all information is appropriate for a school setting.

GAME SETUP

TECHNOLOGY

ELECTRONIC RULES OF ENGAGEMENT CONT'D

5. Do your own work! Do not use other people's intellectual property without their permission. It is a violation of copyright law to copy and paste other's thoughts. When paraphrasing another's idea(s) be sure to cite your source with the URL. It is good practice to hyper-link to your sources.
6. Be aware that pictures may also be protected under copyright laws. Verify you have permission to use the image or if it is under Creative Commons attribution.
7. How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity.
8. If you run across inappropriate material that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is not respectful, tell your guide and parents right away. Do not seek out or share inappropriate material. This will result in an honor code violation and possible exit from Acton Academy West End.
9. Logging in to another hero's program or account is a violation.
10. The SMART Technology Guardrails document must be signed by heroes prior to using any technology on campus AND must be followed at all times.

Heroes who do not abide by these terms and conditions will receive a strike, Honor Code Violation or may be choosing to leave the Acton West End community.

GAME SETUP

TECHNOLOGY

CELL PHONES & SMART DEVICES

Cell phones, tablets, and smart watches are not permitted in the Acton Studio.

If your Hero does bring a cell phone or other device to school, they will be asked to check it into their Studio's phone box upon arrival and may check it back out after school.

AAWE ELECTRONICS/PROPERTY

An integral part of our learning program is using technology for learners to learn math, reading and writing skills at their own pace. School devices are never allowed to be used for social media or gaming. We provide one iPad per learner in Spark and one laptop per learner in other studios as needed to use during the day on campus. They are school property.

- If one is damaged or lost by a learner, the family is responsible for reimbursing the school in the amount of all replacement costs.
- In addition, if any part of the school campus is intentionally damaged or used to cause any damage by a learner, they will be responsible for the cost of the repair.
- Included in your tuition are also the basic necessary school supplies such as pens, paper, pencils and project supplies.

Please note: All devices we provide on our campus have SafeSearch installed and will be protected by BARK.

Nest Cameras/ Video Recording Security

Each school in the Acton Academy Network agrees to use Nest Cams in all Studios. These cameras provide accountability for Acton owners, guides, families, and Heroes.

Photo Release Form

Families are asked to sign a "Photo Release" waiver during their initial enrollment.

THE USE OF ELECTRONICS
IN THE STUDIO ARE FOR
LEARNING PURPOSES ONLY

GAME SETUP

ATTENDANCE, WEATHER, DRESS CODE,

Acton Academy does not have an attendance policy that specifies a required number of days that your child must be in school. It is the school's philosophy that traveling with family and engaging in experiences with family is fruitful and educational.

For Discovery Studio: Heroes who miss or plan to miss more than 5 school days due to excused or unexcused absences in a session must meet with her/his guide and parents/guardians to determine a plan to fulfill their goals and studio requirements. If a hero is on track with goals/badges, this meeting may be unnecessary. Although AAWE is supportive of meaningful absences and understanding of unavoidable absences, it is ultimately the hero's responsibility to fulfill their goals and projects due to absences.

Parents need to be aware that Acton Academy's Learning Design includes much group work and class discussions, both of which are impossible to recreate or replicate. Your child is responsible for their goals and quest responsibilities. If they are not in attendance (or know that they will be gone), they should arrange in advance how to move forward with their group. They may also coordinate to meet virtually with their group during quest time. For unexpected absences, such as a child wakes up ill, please send an email to guides@actonacademywestend.com.

DRESS CODE:

At Acton Academy West End, we value an open learning environment. Guides may ask learners to change their clothing if we feel that it is a distraction to themselves or others. Heroes may not wear clothing that advertises alcohol, firearms/weapons, tobacco products or other drugs, or that is overtly sexual or revealing in nature. Heroes are expected to come dressed in a manner seasonally appropriate each and every day. Heroes who wear clothing deemed inappropriate by a guide or owner for the aforementioned reasons will be given a warning (slight behavioral infraction) and may be sent home or asked to put on a school sweatshirt/sweatpants. Recurrence of inappropriate dress will result in a strike against the Honor Code.

SUBSTANCE MISUSE/ABUSE, WEAPONS AND FIREARMS:

Acton Academy West End has a zero tolerance for chemical and substance misuse and abuse and weapons/firearms. Disregarding this policy may result in immediate dismissal.

INCLEMENT WEATHER DELAY/CANCELLATION:

Acton Academy West End follows Goochland County Public School delays and cancellations for the first 48 hours. If GCPS calls for a 2 hour delay drop off will start at 10:15 a.m. Families who live outside of GCPS who may have more dangerous road conditions may choose to keep their learner at home even if GCPS does not delay.

GAME SETUP

BIRTHDAYS AND FOOD ALLERGIES

We're thrilled to welcome them into the Acton Family and continue to grow this community. Growth is a wonderful thing! As we grow as a school, we also have the opportunity and responsibility to change and adjust some of how we do things in order to serve and love everyone well. Please read this email with your learner so that they understand what changes are being made in order to take care of our studio mates.

FOOD SHARING

We currently have a learner with a severe food allergy. Because of this, there will be no more sharing or trading food during the day between learners. We know this is a big adjustment and we ask that you please talk with your learner about this change. Encourage them to only eat what they brought for their own lunch/snack. We will also be having a launch discussion around this change in the studios as well. This new rule isn't meant to strip away the fun of sharing food, it's a step we're taking to ensure that we keep all of our learners safe!

BIRTHDAYS + SWEET TREATS

We love celebrations and creating traditions at Acton Academy West End and birthdays are no different! Birthday celebrations are a special event at our school! The birthday of each learner is celebrated by their studio mates. Birthday treats are preferred to be shared after school on the playground, so parents can decide what's best for their learner(s). If treats are sent into the studio, it is preferred that it is only for birthdays. We also ask that you please check in with Mr. Michael/Guides first so we can be mindful of any dietary restrictions.

GAME SETUP

ILLNESS AND MEDICAL

Before the first day of school, it is necessary to have a [copy of your child's health and immunization records from your pediatrician's office](#). You may email, mail or hand deliver this information.

Heroes who develop any of the following symptoms will be isolated and their parents will be notified and asked to remove them from school as soon as possible:

- Fever of 100+ F
- Unusual yellow color to skin or eyes
- Diarrhea
- Stiff neck or headache
- Vomiting/Nausea
- Difficult breathing or wheezing
- Severe cough
- Complaints of severe pain

Acton staff have been trained in first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

WHEN TO KEEP YOUR CHILD HOME:

If your child has any of these symptoms please keep them home.

- A fever (temperature of 100 degrees F or higher) within the last 24 hours.
- Vomiting or Diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- Strep, Pinkeye, or any other bacterial illness (must stay home until they have been on antibiotics for a minimum of 48 hours.)
- Severe cold symptoms
- Head lice, nits, scabies, etc
- Atypical rash (until a physician has examined the rash and has cleared your child to return to school.)

MEDICATION:

Should a hero need medication during the day, parents must hand the medicine and instructions to a guide (prescription, over-the-counter, creams, cough drops, homeopathic remedies, etc). Please send any medicine in the original container with the child's name on it and a signed [Medication Authorization Form](#). Staff will not administer prescription or over-the-counter medication, internal or topical, unless it has been submitted by the hero's family. In case of an emergency, staff will contact 911, then contact the family. We have minor first aid materials, itch creams, and some homeopathic remedies that may be administered by a guide as needed (with parent permission).

OUT OF BOUNDS

HONOR CODE

The Honor Code is the Head of School/Guide-directed accountability system, though in upper studios the Studio Council has the right to issue strikes if they deem actions to be out of bounds for their culture. Any instance of the following may result in a STRIKE Against the Honor Code:

HONOR CODE VIOLATIONS:

honor code violations that result in an immediate strike are below

- Acts of physical or verbal aggression of any kind, including hitting, pushing, or threatening.
- Cheating, plagiarizing, or misreporting of accomplished work in any activity.
- Intentional destruction or misuse of School Property inside or outside.
- Inappropriate language or sexual innuendos or actions.
- Leaving campus without parent/guide approval.
- Possessing drugs, tobacco, alcohol or weapons/firearms (real or pretend) during any school day or activity (may result in removal from Acton and a permanent exit from the school).

Generally, learning how to live within the hero contract bounds happens through peer accountability and Hero Bucks. A Strike may be issued by the Head of School, a guide, or council as deemed necessary for a pattern of behavior that is defiantly opposing the spirit of the game, after being guided toward growth and responsibility:

- Displaying a pattern of disrespect for fellow travelers (Harassment/Bullying).
- Displaying a pattern of disrespect/ disregard for various community covenants, including the rules of play, the Hero's agreements of participation & the Studio Contract.
- Displaying a pattern of disrespect/ disregard for launches/circles - which may include consistently late arrivals or being asked to leave the circle.
- Persisting in victim language after being guided toward growth and responsibility.

OUT OF BOUNDS

HONOR CODE/STRIKE SYSTEM

STRIKE SYSTEM

The Guide(s) support the Heroes in learning how to be a friend and a contributing member of the community. This includes understanding that every choice has a consequence. If/When a learner chooses to hurt another person, the consequence is to be separated from the group until he/she decides to help, not hurt, others. The strike system is a consistent and predictable process for learning these important life lessons. All Heroes are aware in advance of these expectations of being in the community.

A STRIKE IS GIVEN IF:

1. A Hero violates the Honor Code (see previous page)
2. A Hero receives 4 warnings violating the studio contract in any given day.

Guides keep track of Hero strikes, detailing the date of the strike, the purpose of the strike, and who gave the strike and share “strike reports” with parents.



Celebrate!

THE RETURN OF AN EAGLE

The definition of hero at Acton is one who gets back up after falling down; or apologizes after making a mistake. The community is always happy when an Hero makes the choice after being sent home to join back up with the group. There is a tradition of joy and forgiveness as there is resolution to these experiences (which are bound to happen to each Hero on this adventure of learning.)

OUT OF BOUNDS

HONOR CODE/STRIKE SYSTEM

PROGRESSION OF STRIKES

1ST STRIKE:

- The hero is removed from the group until they choose to participate again within the community guardrails.
- A guide speaks with the hero to ensure he/she understands why he/she is receiving a strike. Guide points hero to Contract and asks “Can you see how holding you accountable for your actions (by issuing the strike) is operating within your Studio Contract of Promises?”
- The guide works with the hero to brainstorm 2-3 specific strategies to prevent a second strike against the Honor Code.
- Guide sends an email home noting that a strike against the Honor Code was given with basic context.

2ND STRIKE:

- The hero is removed from the group until they choose to participate again within the community guardrails.
- Everything from First Strike process above
- Strike Check-in Form will be emailed to parents and sent home with the hero. The family will complete this form together, coming up with 2-3 strategies they will use to help prevent a 3rd strike/ Honor Code Violation. Parents must acknowledge they have read and received before beginning the following school day. The guide will review the plan with the hero upon their return to school.
- If a behavior is deemed seriously oppositional to Acton culture or harmful to the studio/ school/ other learners, two strikes may be issued for a single act/ violation.

3RD STRIKE:

- The hero resets at home for a day.
- Everything from First / Second Strike process above
- If the strike occurs at the end of the day, the hero stays home the following day.
- When returning to school the following day, hero will share at launch 2-3 strategies with the studio that they will use to help them make better choices moving forward. If they are unprepared or unwilling to do this, they should remain at home and are placed on a probationary contract.
- Guide/Head of School will schedule a mandatory Honor Code Violation Meeting with parents and Hero.
- The studio will celebrate the hero’s return and honor the process of learning from failures.

SUBSEQUENT STRIKES

- Strikes 4 - 5 - 7 - 8 will follow the Second Strike Process listed above, plus they will reset for a day at home (See timeline on next page). Strikes 6 & 9 will result in additional Honor Code Violations (HCV).
- Generally, if a hero receives two honor code violations within an academic year, they are electing to leave the school. This will be decided according to the Head of School’s discretion.

APPEAL PROCESS

- At Acton, we are committed to due process, this means that if a hero believes the process has not been upheld they have the right to appeal the strike, a hero must submit a written statement to a guide within 48 hours. It is the responsibility of the appealing hero to provide a clear and detailed account in their statement. The appeal must include at least one of the following:
 - An explanation that the hero was not actually doing the thing/action noted in the Strike against the honor code and/or
 - An explanation that the action/ actions committed are not a violation of the Honor Code.

OUT OF BOUNDS

HONOR CODE/STRIKE SYSTEM

STRIKE TIMELINE

1ST STRIKE process followed.

2ND STRIKE process followed.

3RD STRIKE (HCV #1) process followed and:

- + Hero goes home
- + parent/Hero HCV meeting
- + Probationary Contract may be needed

4TH STRIKE process followed and:

- + Hero goes home/reset

5TH STRIKE process followed and:

- + Hero goes home/reset

6TH STRIKE (HCV #2) process followed and:

- + Hero goes home
- + parent/Hero meeting
- + May be choosing to leave Acton
- + Probationary or Exit Contract may be needed

7TH STRIKE process followed and:

- + Hero goes home/reset

8TH STRIKE process followed and:

- + Hero goes home
- + parent/Hero meeting
- + May be choosing to leave Acton
- + Probationary Contract may be needed

9TH STRIKE (HCV #3) process followed and:

The hero has chosen to leave the school but may reapply at some point.

HONOR CODE VIOLATION MEETING :

An Honor Code Violation meeting is held when an Honor Code Violation has been issued. The parents, the hero, Head of School, and guide will be invited to a mandatory meeting where a Behavior Plan will be agreed to. The plan will direct the hero to improve his/her behavior in order to not commit additional infractions and may include but is not limited to community service, apology, behavior conferencing, restricted freedoms, and community give-back. Heroes who adhere to the plan will not be subject to further disciplinary action. Failure to comply with a Behavioral Plan will, at the Head of School's discretion, result in choosing to leave the community.

HONOR CODE VIOLATION RESET :

Strikes and HCVs are tallied over the academic year and reset at the beginning of a new academic year. Generally, if a hero receives two Honor Code Violations within an academic year, they are electing to leave the community but it will be at the discretion of the head of school. This will be handled according to the Head of School's discretion. A hero who requires constant redirection and continually dismisses their studio contract has chosen to not be successful within the Acton Academy learning model. The Head of School has the right to exit a hero immediately from the school if a behavior is deemed extreme without reaching their second or third HCV. However, this is NOT an automatic expulsion.

PROBATIONARY CONTRACTS :

Acton Academy's Heroes drafted and ratified contracts provide a framework for Heroes to learn self-management and self-governance. When the studio is functioning well with leaders who are committed to the Tribe and positively working towards a Hero's Journey, the learning is powerful and occurs at an exponential rate. However, poor choices & attitudes can overwhelm and exhaust the healthier parts of studio culture.

We may create a personalized Probationary contract with clearer guardrails and more immediate consequences.

- Probationary Contracts offer a short period of time to cure problem attitudes/behaviors and a period of one to six months to measure long-term success. Specific measurements and actions will be outlined clearly.
- We reserve the right to ask a Hero or family to leave immediately for behavior that is dangerous or especially damaging.
- At times there may be a need for a number of "infractions" that, when met, will indicate that a hero is choosing to leave the school. This number is known to the Head of School only.

GAME PLAY

STUDIO SYSTEMS

Acton systems are implemented based upon Studio needs. Not all systems may be “in place” in each Studio and will vary at times.

STUDIO MAINTENANCE

Students are required to help maintain their studio through daily studio maintenance. This encourages organization, cleaning habits and a sense of ownership and responsibility.

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Weekly hero meetings are held whereby heroes can propose new rules for the Studio, encourage each other through character callouts, or bring up concerns and potential solutions.

FREEDOM LEVELS

Each Studio will have a structure of hero progression in place. As powerful habits are practiced and proficiency is proven, heroes will be granted additional privileges and responsibilities. Should a hero choose to not progress towards proficiency they may be choosing to exit Acton. These habits may include (but are not limited to): time management, honoring the studio schedule, personal accountability, work ethic/grit, and goal finishing. This also upholds the real-world application that “freedom is earned” and protected by hard work, responsibility and sacrifice.

HONOR THE SCHEDULE

At Acton, we have many liberties. We allow people to work at their own pace and drive themselves. This freedom is defined as freedom to work ahead and to work towards independent goals/passions during specified times — not freedom FROM WORK or freedom to do ANYTHING YOU WANT WHENEVER YOU WANT. This implies that you are always working towards a larger goal as part of your Hero’s Journey and that you honor the studio’s forward movement as well, which is facilitated by the studio schedule.

EAGLES BUCKS

Hero Bucks are the hero-directed accountability system. As heroes produce work, they earn Hero Bucks. Heroes can hold one another accountable by requesting Hero Bucks for contract infractions. At that point the hero who made the alleged violation may do one of the following:

1. Agree that an infraction was made and pay the bank 1 Hero Buck, or...
2. Take the matter to the Hero Buck Committee to seek guidance on how to resolve the matter. The Hero Buck Committee is a group of elected heroes who have agreed to fairly and without partiality help fellow heroes resolve their conflicts.

GAME PLAY

STUDIO SYSTEMS

Acton systems are implemented based upon Studio needs. Not all systems may be “in place” in each Studio and will vary at times.

CIRCLE DISCUSSIONS

CIRCLE DISCUSSIONS ARE REQUIRED FOR ALL LEARNERS

Circle is sacred and every hero is expected to participate EVERY TIME. If a hero is late or asked to leave the circle, they will sit behind the circle and continue to participate through listening and taking notes. Heroes should not leave the circle until it has finished and should arrive at circle having taken care of anything (such as bathroom use) ahead of time. Heroes are expected to uphold decisions made in circle, even if they are unable to participate. It is a hero's responsibility to know what is being discussed in circle. Disregarding Circle is a violation of promises made to participate at Acton.

EXHIBITION + REFLECTION

Two of the most important days in our learning arcs are Exhibition Day and the final Friday of a session. All Heroes are expected to attend these final two days of each session. Not only is the Exhibition an important culmination of the hard work that goes into each session, but the Friday after is just as vital. On these days Heroes not only take this time to reflect on the session, they also check off goals, submit outstanding badges, complete peer feedback and more. We ask families keep this in mind when scheduling trips during the break week. Breaks are for rest & recovery, but there are many lessons to be learned by sprinting through the finish line each session. (Sparks will not have an exhibition after every session).

BRAINS, BUDDIES, BROWSE

Acton Academy is a hero led and independent learner environment. Guides do not serve as Teachers at Acton. Heroes learn to teach themselves by developing problem solving skills. Should a hero run into difficulty, they are encouraged to use Brains, Buddies, & Browse (3B's before G).

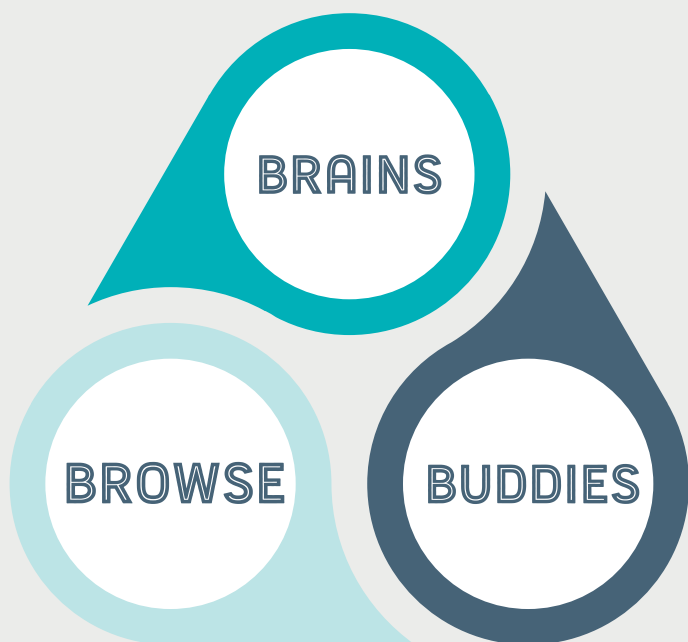
- **Brains:** First exhaust your own knowledge by thoroughly defining the problem and attempting to solve it on your own.
- **Buddies:** Who is someone that may have expertise in the area you are struggling in? This is not a time to simply get the answer from another hero but to jointly work to understand how to solve the problem for yourself.
- **Browse:** What resources do you have available to you that may give you clues or ideas? Heroes are encouraged to use in-studio resources, approved online resources, or collaborate with a community expert.

A foundational principle within the Acton learning model is to provide opportunities for heroes to learn to collaboratively solve hard problems. Perseverance and creativity are developed through this process. Acton Academy discourages the use of tutors or adults “helping” heroes solve problems. Encourage your hero to take ownership if they are facing a hard question and/or challenge, but always point them in the direction of problem solving and perseverance.

STUDIO SYSTEMS

BRAINS, BUDDIES, BROWSE

Acton Academy is a hero-led and independent learner environment. Guides do not serve as Teachers at Acton. Heroes learn to teach themselves by developing problem solving skills. Should a Hero run into a difficulty , they are encouraged to use Brains, Buddies, and Browse.



First exhaust your own knowledge by thoroughly defining the problem and attempting to solve it on your own.

Who is someone who may have expertise or experience in this area?

What resources do you have available to you that may give you clues or ideas?

Lastly, if a hero has diligently exhausted all three of these options and is still struggling with the concept, they may ask a guide, not for the answer, but for assistance which will be given through a series of socratic questions and demonstrations to help guide the learner towards the solution. Guides do not provide direct instruction to assist with Core Skills (except in the rare case where they may "take off their guide hat" momentarily.)

A foundational principle within the Acton learning model is to provide opportunities for heroes to learn to collaboratively solve hard problems. Perseverance and creativity are developed through this process.

GAME PLAY

STUDIO SYSTEMS

Acton systems are implemented based upon Studio needs. Not all systems may be “in place” in each Studio and will vary at times.

360 FEEDBACK

Periodically, the Heroes receive a questionnaire whereby they are asked to rate studio-mates and/or guide. The rating is based on a scale of 1 to 5 and provides the ability to write constructive feedback. The feedback can be either positive or an area for growth. The review measures leadership, work methodology, and contribution to the studio. Intentionally hurtful or unhelpful comments will be removed by the guides before they are shared with Heroes.

This can be a very challenging experience for both Heroes and parents. For more about 360 reviews and the parent-Hero experience, please read this [helpful blog post](#):

CHARACTER CALLOUTS

Learners have the opportunity each week to give character callouts to one another for things such as hard work, being a good friend, courageous, helpful, etc.

A BUG AND A WISH

A Bug and a Wish is a tool for learners to grow in their ability to give and receive feedback with one another. A bug may be feedback and a wish is something they think could be improved upon.

RESOLVING CONFLICT

It is an important part of the Acton learning model to allow heroes to resolve their own conflict by:

1. Controlling tempers and words.
2. Sharing their feelings.
3. Seeing both sides.
4. Focusing on solutions vs. whining, blaming, or complaining.

If your hero has a conflict within the Studio, we encourage you to calmly talk through it with them and empower them to use one of the following systems to handle the matter:

Courageous Conversations: A one-on-one conversation between heroes to identify the emotions that each hero is feeling and provide an initial remedy to small problems between heroes.

Peace Table

A hero or guide may call a peace table with involved parties. This process is very powerful and fosters healthy friendship and communication skills through a scripted conversation that allows heroes to:

1

EXPRESS FEELINGS & DEFINE THE PROBLEM

2

IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

3

MAKE A PLAN TO MOVE FORWARD

3 KEY ACTON SYSTEMS

BOUNDARY SYSTEM

A Boundary Systems says: “You have a great deal of freedom, as long as you stay between these lines.”

-Momentary failures and real-world consequences are a natural part of 21st-century learning, but shame is not. It is never acceptable to intentionally shame a young Hero, parent, or Guide, or expose them to serious harm.

-Teaching by lecturing or issuing instructions is not acceptable. A Guide’s role is to model behavior that leads to self-directed learning.

-Guides do not assign grades or rank learners but simply ask: “Is that the best you can do?” and invite a learner to try again if the answer is “no.”

-Guides never nag, nudge or use passive aggressive behavior to try and influence the choice of a learner.

-All communications with parents must be transparent to the community so the responsibility for excellence and growth ultimately remains with young heroes and parents.

DIAGNOSTIC SYSTEM

A Diagnostic Systems says: “These are the numbers you need to hit to be rewarded.”

-We track how quickly freedom and responsibility for leading a studio can be transferred to Sheepdogs and other learners.

-We judge our progress through objective, anonymous surveys open to our entire community that show how well we are delivering on our promises.

-We measure the cost per young hero transformed to see how peer-to-peer learning and paid apprenticeships can drive down costs.

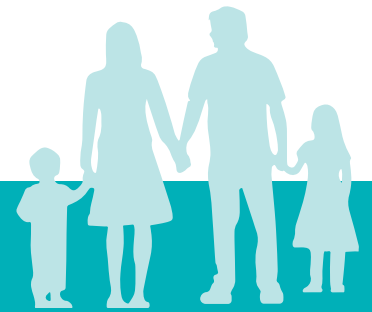
INTERACTIVE SYSTEM

An Interactive Systems says: “You are important as an individual. You deserve to be nurtured and coached to reach your full potential.”

-We collect and share examples, testimonials, and experiments so each Guide has the tools, skills, and character required to succeed.

KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME

MINDSETS & HABITS



PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Acton is a family journey. We are committed to helping parents help their heroes. Setting and tracking goals together is a simple but effective way for parents to be involved in the learning process. It respects our commitment to learner driven education while at the same time giving you a meaningful insight into the learning that is happening here and a way to support, encourage, and journey alongside your child. We encourage all parents to be involved in their child's weekly goals.

As part of our commitment to families, each family will receive a survey via email each week. We ask that you guide your child to provide helpful input rather than anything personal about another learner. The summary of these surveys will be shared with Acton families and guides. By sharing the results, we uphold our shared value of transparency and accountability to you. The survey is a place for constructive input.

One of the most powerful opportunities a Hero has within the Acton learning model are regular chances to learn self-governance, problem solving, discipline, and perseverance. As parents of an Acton hero, you play a very important part! We encourage parents to use the Socratic Method at home which furthers the learning opportunities of problem solving and mastery of self. If your child is choosing not to work at school or has made decisions that could result in an Honor Code Violation, we encourage you to allow natural consequences to come to fruition.

We respect the role of parenting while also embracing each Hero's Journey toward self-governance and responsibility. Helping your child do their work or shielding them from negative consequences takes away the power of the Acton learning model. Additionally, if your child encounters a problem within the studio, encourage them to handle the situation for themselves. Without an opportunity for practice, a Hero will struggle to develop these valuable lifelong skills.

STUDIO OBSERVATION:

We welcome parents to visit and observe the studio experience to gain further understanding of the learning journey. The studio however is a very special environment for the heroes and we want to protect their personal space. The following guidelines will help ensure that the studio experience does not become diluted by interruptions.

- Submit a request to visit at least 48 hours in advance and include the date, time of arrival and expected length of stay. (please note that parent observations are not offered during Session 1).
- Please inform your child that you will be visiting to observe and that you will just be watching the group at work.
- During your observation time, you may quietly greet your child and then find a comfortable place to sit. Enjoy observing! Please limit your visit to 1 hour or less.
- Please silence your phone while in the studio

KEEP YOUR HEAD IN THE GAME

MINDSETS & HABITS

FAILURE

Your child will fail. This is built into the system so that they can learn from it, improve their processes and grow. Embracing failure as a teacher of valuable lessons vs. something to be avoided is an important concept to embrace. As parents, our greatest opportunity to influence our children is by modeling the behaviors we hope they develop. Embrace the Hero's Journey and avoid being the victim.

GROWTH MINDSET

Welcome challenges and embrace responsibility. Strive for and celebrate excellence. Praise heroic choices by others. Practice acts of kindness, hold firm boundaries in relationships. Be grateful and generous.

FIXED/VICTIM MINDSET

Avoids hardwork. Looks for the easy way out and seeks loopholes, rather than delivering their best work. Fail to keep their word, gossip, brag distract or diminish others. Feel entitled, whine, blame, complain, give excuses for poor behavior or work.

JOURNEY MEETINGS

All parents are required to have a journey meeting by the end of Session One with their learner and their Guide. Additionally, journey meetings are able to be scheduled as needed throughout the year. These meetings are an opportunity for the learner to share with their parents about their growth, the goals they accomplished this session, and the goals they want to set for next session. Guides will join these meetings, but the goal is for these meetings to remain learner led.

KEEPING SCORE

ON THE LEARNING JOURNEY

We don't "keep score" in the same sense that other schools or sports games do. Your hero will set goals and track progress as a tool to help them grow and improve their skills. heroes can see where their friends are excelling and struggling and they often share these successes and setbacks with one another as stepping stones on their journey. They learn to support, empathize and to seek and offer help.

SELF-PACED MASTERY OF CORE SKILLS

Learners at Acton have the opportunity to work at their own pace. We recognize that children learn at different speeds, and we are watching for consistent and diligent progress. Some Acton learners complete multiple grade badges in a school year while others might take longer. We invite parents to embrace their child's learning speed and embrace the philosophy of...

"The only person you should compare yourself to, is you - yesterday."

Within the Acton model, Heroes are provided the privilege and respect of being held to an expectation of excellence and mastery. Heroes will not be awarded badges simply by completing tasks, but by mastering them. An expectation of mastery may mean that a Hero needs more than a school year to complete grade level work, but families can be assured that their child is not being pushed into more difficult concepts before understanding foundational skills.



GRADES VS. BADGES

Milestones of achievement at Acton are Learning Badges which prove success in completing a long-term series of learning challenges. These learning badges will document the entire Acton Academy learning journey with evidence appropriate for college applications and job interviews of the authentic accomplishments of each Acton graduate. heroes will receive feedback of the work they produce from their peers, guides and from other sources as appropriate. Their progress will be documented through their achievement of badges in the core skills of Writing, Civilization, Problem Solving/Math, Reading and Socratic discussions. In addition, Journey Tracker, Journey meetings and exhibitions share documentation of learning in the arts and sciences through projects and quest work. The software programs used in our studios track the progress of learning and can be accessed by parents at any time and as milestones are reached may also be reflected on. (this will not begin until Session 2).

KEEPING SCORE

ON THE LEARNING JOURNEY

STANDARDIZED TESTING :

We do not believe that Standardized Testing is a critical component of a quality, meaningful education. However, they may offer guides and parents some useful data. Heroes age 6 or older by Sept 30th will be given the nationally-recognized Iowa Test to assess progress once or twice a year. Your hero will be guided through the process so that they have a full understanding of the purpose of such tests. These tests are given only to watch for patterns of progress over time. If testing results are an important benchmark for your family, we encourage you to go over them with your child. We also know that these numbers are not important to all families, because they are a single measure and can never reflect the personal character growth of a child. These test results are the easiest form of "proof of progress" to submit to your local superintendent each August to continue as a homeschool co-op.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATIONAL PLAN (I.E.P) :

The Acton Academy learning model is not well suited to support children with certain learning struggles or behavioral challenges. When a guide recognizes that a Hero is not reaching his or her full potential or is showing signs of a learning challenge, a letter will be sent to the Hero's parents outlining the school's concerns and recommendations for further assessments. The school, parents, and Hero will determine appropriate accommodations and/or interventions to meet the needs of the Hero.

Acton Academy does not offer one on one tutoring. We do, however, provide a space, during school hours, where specialized tutors can work with Heroes who have a formal dyslexia/dysgraphia diagnosis. Families of these students are required to cover the costs associated with these tutors, but we are happy to provide the space.

As a small school, we do not have access to a school counselor, on-campus nurse, or special education coordinators. If guides encounter social or emotional needs that may require additional professional support, observations will be provided to parents via email and/or in person, and we will make a suggestion for outside support. If it is determined that a Hero's individual needs interfere with the overall learning community (and studio functionality), the Hero may be asked to leave Acton.

SITTING ON THE SIDELINES

COMMUNICATION NORMS

Do this first

PRIOR TO REACHING OUT TO A GUIDE:

- Use the [Parent Portal](#) resources, including this [Playbook](#), to answer your question or address your concern.
- Talk with your Hero about their questions/ concerns and encourage them to solve the issue themselves.
- Take the initiative to stay informed by reading all forms of school communication.
- Provide your feedback/ concern via the [Weekly Survey](#) and allow adequate time for the issue to be addressed.

CONTACTING A GUIDE & WHAT CHANNEL TO USE:

Text-a-Guide



Early Pickup, Late Arrival,
Absences, Illnesses
Text: 804-657-4773



EMAIL



Setting up meetings or studio observation day, something that involves more than one studio, question playbook doesn't answer.

guide@actonacademywestend.com

If you need to contact guides, please do so via email. Guides share a common email account (guide@actonacademywestend.com). We practice full transparency, open and honest communication in the studio, therefore please include the Head of School in all forms of direct communication that relate to school matters.

On the rare occasion a situation calls for a meeting with either a guide or the Head of School, we may present you with a recipe for steps we ask you and your hero to have taken prior to scheduling the meeting. Please understand this is done not to create a barrier between our team and your family, but to ensure we have done everything we can to empower your hero to first take action and resolve the issue on their own. So rather than answering questions they may ask you questions and refer you to resources to help you discover your own answers. Guides will not be available during morning drop-off, during school or afternoon pick-up times unless it is an urgent matter. We love chatting with you but, this policy is to protect our time with the Heroes. Any conversations about a learner and their journey at Acton, we ask that it always include the learner.

ACTON CALENDAR

View the [Acton calendar](#) before the start of the school year. This calendar will help you manage field trips, Parent Meetings, parent coffees on campus, end of the year celebrations, Exhibitions and other Acton events.

EMAIL/TEXT UPDATES

Important announcements and updates will be sent out via email and through the [Acton App](#). If you would like to receive these announcements via text, please inform the Head of School. In case of a school-wide emergency, we will send information to everyone via email, the app, and text message. If you are experiencing an emergency, you can reach Mr. Michael, Head of School at 804-657-4773.

FORMING A TEAM

PARENT/FAMILY JOURNEY

The life of an Acton parent is not always easy, as we are committed to let struggle help our children to grow and become independent and confident learners. As such, AAVE has a deep core belief that parents need to also be diligent in being on their own journey. While this can take on many forms, we strongly encourage that you continue to read and study the Acton suggested books and/or complete Family Badges as part of your growth. The more you learn about why we chose Acton Academy West End and why our systems work, the more meaningful this journey will be for you. You will be better able to notice the “small” victories and feel confident in your hero’s (and your own!) ability to find a calling and change the world!

PARENT/FAMILY SOCIALIZATION

Feel free to socialize! We want our parents to be highly involved in creating a positive community of family support and friendship. As a small school we will offer occasional gatherings, but feel that each family can positively contribute by planning their own activities/gatherings and reaching out to the Acton West End Community for camaraderie. A family roster will be compiled and shared for your convenience in the Parent Portal, please use this as a resource to connect with other families.

PARENT COFFEES

Parent coffees will be offered a few times throughout the year. These are casual gatherings on campus during morning arrival for you to get to know other parents and learn more about the Acton learning experience. We encourage you to arrive at 8:15am, drop off your Hero and stay for a cup of coffee and to connect with other parents.

PARENT BRUNCH MEETINGS

Each year we host five parent brunch meetings. Part of the Parent Contract includes the commitment for one parent from each family to attend at least three of these meetings each year. Parent Meetings will provide an opportunity for you to reflect on your own Hero’s Journey particularly as it relates to being an Acton Parent.

The purpose of these meetings is a far cry from a typical “P.T.A.” meeting. Rather, they are created to inspire you to find your own calling and to be better equipped to help your child maneuver the landscape of his or her own, unique journey. Dates can be found on the school calendar and more information will be shared prior to each brunch.

FORMING A TEAM

PARENT/FAMILY JOURNEY

...stop thinking of yourself as the manager of kids' education, and start seeing yourself as their consultant. someone who gives advice, shares experiences, and provides resources while remaining fundamentally detached from specific outcomes of the process."

- BLAKE BOLES

PARENT PORTAL WEBSITE

This is a central hub for all information. Links to important information, documents, and resources are housed here. Be sure to save this [LINK](#) for reference.

BAND APP

The band apps are required for parent communication! We use the bands to share photos and updates, connect parents with one another and share announcements, etc!

[EQUIP BAND \(required\) →](#)
[CONNECT BAND →](#)
[INSPIRE BAND →](#)

Studio Specific Bands:
[SPARKS BAND →](#)
[DISCOVERY BAND →](#)
[ODYSSEY BAND.→](#)

FAMILY BADGES

While sometimes it may feel like "extra" - it TOTALLY is!

Acton is a family journey. It is the "extra" that will help your family to truly take advantage of the Acton Learning Experience, to GROW TOGETHER, and to support your child on their journey as you make your own journey more fulfilling. It's all part of the adventure of life...and Life At Acton.

WEEKLY SURVEYS

As part of our commitment to families, each family will receive a survey via email each week. We ask that you guide your child to provide helpful input rather than anything personal about another learner. The summary of these surveys will be shared with Acton families and guides. By sharing the results, we uphold our shared value of transparency and accountability to you. The survey is a place for constructive input.

EQUIPPING AND INSPIRING

ACTON PARENTS FOR A HERO'S JOURNEY



WHAT SHOULD I DO AS A PARENT IF MY EAGLE HAS AN ISSUE IN THE STUDIO?

Great question. Our goal is to arm Heroes to solve their own problems, without parental intervention. So:

1. Ask your Hero for permission to become involved before you do anything.
2. Resist the temptation to email a Guide unless it is a matter of serious, immediate harm. Guides are asked not to respond directly to parent emails, but to follow a process that equips the Hero to solve his or her own problem.
3. Ask your Hero whether they should approach a Guide or peer with the issue and help them frame the issue in a positive light.
4. If the issue is a personal one between Heroes, ask your Hero to initiate a Conflict Resolution. If he or she needs support, encourage him or her to ask a Guide.
5. If the issue is serious and remains unresolved, an Hero may call for everyone involved to meet to address the issue, and parents are welcome to observe but not participate. We've found requiring everyone to be in the same room discourages mixed messages and triangulation, and often deescalates issues.

WHAT IF MY EAGLE IS UNHAPPY?

Our promise is to equip and inspire your Hero to find a calling that will change the world. Struggles and difficulties are part of the journey.

We are encouraged by research showing we all have a natural set point for happiness, and tend to revert to that level no matter what the circumstances – so chasing happiness often is a dead-end journey. Acton Academy focuses on long term satisfaction and fulfillment rather than momentary happiness.

As parents, we've found our Heroes grow most when we comfort them and listen empathically, but do not try to solve the problem ourselves or allow blame to be cast on others. "I hear you. That must be so hard. I trust you to find a way to solve this on your own and can't wait to hear how you did it" seem to be the most powerful words we can use as parents.

If your goal is to have a child who is happy all the time, Acton Academy may not be the right place for you.

WHAT IF MY EAGLE IS FACING A PROBLEM THAT MAKES ME ESPECIALLY ANXIOUS?

Our Heroes take extremely difficult situations in stride every day. It's called life. Most of our hearts would break if we knew the challenges Heroes quietly and bravely overcome.

We've found when an event makes us especially anxious – like social anxiety --- it is more likely about an unresolved issue we faced in childhood than a problem our Hero is confronting. However, once an Hero senses our concern, he or she may consciously or unconsciously return to the topic, because it brings attention and comfort. So if a situation makes you particularly angry or anxious, before reacting ask: "Is this more about me or my Hero?"

EQUIPPING AND INSPIRING

ACTON PARENTS FOR A HERO'S JOURNEY



WHY DOES ACTON NOT HAVE A PTA, PTO OR PARENT COUNCIL?

At Acton, everything we do is designed to empower learners, guides, and parents to each take bold and courageous ownership within their unique spheres of responsibility. Traditional PTAs—while well-intentioned—tend to blur those lines in ways that actually work against the independence, clarity, and trust that make the Acton model thrive. Unlike traditional models, at Acton, parents are invited to give feedback to owners weekly, to observe launches, attend exhibitions, chaperone field trips and are constantly supported on their own Hero's Journey's through Parent Brunches, Badge work and community resource recommendations.

The very thing that makes Acton different from traditional schools is that this is **A COMMUNITY & A PARTNERSHIP**. Parents owning their own individual feedback is at the foundation of this community being successful. We cannot ask our learners to boldly take a stand for their own concerns and feedback in their studios and then not expect the same of our Acton parents. When a learner bravely confronts their studio with concerns during a Townhall and takes a stand, this is the sign of a healthy studio culture. Similarly, when Acton parents are brave enough to send feedback on the weekly feedback form or ask their Running Squad for support, that is a sign that an Acton community as a whole is healthy as well.

Here's why Parent Feedback via a PTA, PTO or PARENT COUNCIL does not align with the Acton Model:

1. Different Foundations

In a conventional school, a PTA exists because authority and decision-making are centralized in administration and teachers. Parents form a PTA to advocate for change, fundraise, or influence those decisions. At Acton, parents are already partners, not petitioners. We invite open dialogue, trust, and shared mission through direct connection and collaboration, not through committees or hierarchies.

2. Ownership, Not Representation

The Acton model is built on individual responsibility and direct communication, the same principles we model for learners. A PTA can unintentionally create an “us vs. them” dynamic, where a few parents represent the many, rather than each family engaging personally and directly with owners as needed.

3. Energy Flow

Every ounce of parent energy matters. At Acton, we channel that energy into studio support, community gatherings, and mission-driven service, not bureaucracy. Parent-led efforts like hosting events, organizing playdates, mentoring new families, or supporting the Children's Business Fair are wonderful because they're organic, joyful, and tied to purpose, not procedures.

4. Alignment and Trust

The Acton promise depends on mutual trust between families, owners and guides. PTAs—by design—can evolve into forums for control, policy debate, or lobbying, which undermines that trust and shifts the culture toward negotiation rather than collaboration. Our version of partnership thrives through shared stories, open conversations and feedback, and a clear understanding of each person's role in the Hero's Journey.

EQUIPPING AND INSPIRING

ACTON PARENTS FOR A HERO'S JOURNEY



I'M FRUSTRATED BECAUSE I KEEP EMAILING GUIDES AND NEVER GET AN ANSWER OR RESOLUTION.

Guides are equipped never to come between an Hero and their parents. Our job is to let parents parent; let Heroes learn to solve their own problem in a safe environment; and as Guides, to ensure the guidelines and processes Heroes create are respected.

All emails sent to any one Guide or Owner are immediately copied to all Guides for transparency and so everyone is on the same page. Any conversations about a learner and their journey at Acton, we ask that it always include the learner and are never just parents with Guides.

WHY CAN'T YOU FORCE MY EAGLE TO _____?

Many of us wish our Hero would spend more time on handwriting or spelling or Math, and when he or she doesn't, we long for a learning community or school to require the behavior.

Unfortunately, lasting learning doesn't work this way. Someone has to want to learn, if deep learning is to occur.

We've found that Growth Mindset language and praise – and most of all patience – work better than criticism.

WHAT IF MY EAGLE GETS A THIRD STRIKE AND HAS TO SPEND A DAY AT HOME?

It happens to every Hero at some point. We believe this is a powerful opportunity for deep learning. Everyone makes mistakes, including harming others with our actions or words, but when discovered and called-out, it gives us a chance to encourage deep introspection and make amends.

As parents, we've found it is far more powerful to see if we need to change things at home to support our child's learning. Reading through Laura Sandefer's [blog](#) for Acton parents is a resource to refuel your own parenting journey on these hard days.

WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT HOW MY EAGLE IS PROGRESSING?

In the Discovery Studio, our focus is on the process of learning. We recommend checking in with your Hero every couple of weeks to walk through the Journey Tracker together. Are there areas your Hero hasn't been working? Talk through the reasons why. Is there someone they could seek for support in the studio? Are they confused about what to do? Should the guide make the instructions more clear? Sometimes an Hero in the Discovery Studio (DS) studio focuses only on reading or math for a season. We think this is fine. The goal is to keep the light of curiosity alive. The end of each session is an opportune time to talk about what your Hero is pleased with and what they hope to do differently in the coming session. Parents and Heroes will have an opportunity once or twice a year to engage in a Journey Meeting facilitated by the Guide. These are great times to check in and see how your Hero manages his or her learning.

EQUIPPING AND INSPIRING

ACTON PARENTS FOR A HERO'S JOURNEY



WHAT IF MY EAGLE SAYS HE/SHE JUST CAN'T LEARN FROM KHAN ACADEMY?

Many parents worry that without a teacher it's impossible to "learn math." We've found just the opposite: Khan Academy is incredibly powerful and requires users to learn to think critically, from a number of perspectives, mastering a far broader set of mathematical approaches.

Heroes who have a hard time with Khan Academy typically struggle because they do not do the work or refuse to watch the videos.

So if your Hero is struggling, encourage them to watch the videos, possibly more than one time, and only afterwards to seek Socratic help in the studio.

WHY AREN'T EXHIBITIONS MORE POLISHED, WITH A CLEAR PRESENTATION OF ALL THE INFORMATION THAT'S BEEN TAUGHT DURING THE SESSION?

Exhibitions are an opportunity for Heroes to share twice a year what they are working on in the studio and for parents to experience the learning process. These events are not staged or managed by adults. They are themselves a powerful learning experience for the Heroes. They also serve to provide a deadline and, hence, motivation to work hard. Parents can expect to witness failure. It is from this failure that Heroes learn to do something differently the next time. Reflection time after an exhibition is one of the richest learning opportunities for Heroes. They will reflect together what worked, what didn't and how they can improve. We encourage parents to engage in such reflection at home, too.

WHAT IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND A STUDIO SYSTEM, LIKE EAGLE BUCKS, BADGES, OR FREEDOM LEVELS?

It takes time to understand the Heroes' systems. First, ask your Hero to explain and teach you. If your Hero says he or she doesn't understand the system, it's more likely he/she just doesn't want to discuss it. It will require patience and an acceptance of ambiguity from you in the beginning. But before you know it, your Hero and his or her friends will be able to teach you anything you'd like to know about studio life.

Being an Acton parent is a unique calling. Your child will bring home new skills and ideas gained from learning in a Socratic way. They will be more independent in their learning and more able to share their ideas and make personal decisions. It is a challenge to be on the other end of this transformation as a parent. Acton founder, Laura Sandefer created a parent blog you can view here:

www.actonacademyparents.com

UP YOUR GAME

RECOMMENDED DEEP BOOKS

[Nurture Shock, Po Bronson](#)

[The Gift of Imperfection, Brene Brown](#)

[The One World School House, Salman Khan](#)

[Mindset, Carol S. Dweck](#)

[Daring Greatly, Brene Brown](#)

[Unschooling Rules, Clark Aldrich](#)

[Your Three Year Old, Louise Bates Ames, Ph.D. \(Each book for each age\)](#)

[The 3 Big Questions for a Frantic Family, Patrick Lencioni](#)

[A Thomas Jefferson Education, Oliver DeMille](#)

[The Talent Code, Daniel Coyle](#)

[Choice Words, Peter H. Johnston](#)

[The Price of Privilege, Madeline Levine, Ph.D.](#)

[Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius, Angeline Stoll Lillard](#)

[10 Conversations You Need to Have With Your Children, Shmuley Boteach](#)

[An Ethic of Excellence, Ron Berger](#)

[The E-Myth Manager, Michael E. Gerber](#)

[The Smartest Kids in the World and How They Got that Way, Amanda Ripley](#)

[Mastery: The Keys to Success And Long-Term Fulfillment, George Leonard](#)

[2002 Ways to Show Your Kids You Love Them, Cyndi Haynes](#)

[Free Range Kids, Lenore Skenazy](#)

[Influencer, Kerry Patterson, et al](#)

[Crucial Conversations, Kerry Patterson, et al](#)

[The Dream Manager, Matthew Kelly](#)

EST 2022

Acton
ACADEMY

WEST END