



**PARENT AND STUDENT HANDBOOK**  
**2024-2025**

The Girls' School of Austin  
2007 McCall  
Austin, TX 78703  
[www.thegirlsschool.org](http://www.thegirlsschool.org)

Campus hours 7:30 am - 5:30 pm

Office hours: 8:00 am - 5:30 pm

Phone: 512-478-7827

GSA Website 'MySchool' Password: welovelearning

## **OUR MISSION**

The Girls' School of Austin provides an academically challenging education for girls in a community that fosters creative learning and personal excellence. Our mission is to develop confident young women who lead intellectually vibrant and fulfilling lives.

## **OUR COMMUNITY**

- is respectful, inclusive, and supportive.
- celebrates the efforts and achievements of hardworking students.
- thrives under the guidance of dedicated, inspiring teachers.

## **WE BELIEVE**

- curiosity, creativity, diversity, and a willingness to take risks advances intellectual growth.
- a well-rounded education provides the foundation for scholarly and personal pursuits.
- service to others and self-awareness are essential to the learning experience.

## WELCOME

The Girls' School of Austin welcomes our returning and new students.

This handbook is your guide to the policies and procedures of The Girls' School of Austin. Parents, please read these pages with your daughter(s) before Back-to-School Night so that the policies of our school are clearly understood by both you and your incoming student(s). The important rules and regulations listed within this handbook provide much of the infrastructure that keeps our school running smoothly.

### PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES

Parents trust The Girls' School of Austin to provide an excellent education for our students, and our mission and values provide anchors for community members' relationships in classrooms, on campus, in rehearsals, and at special events. Because parents are partners in the GSA community, their participation and contributions are a vital part of our students' education.

#### **The Girls' School of Austin encourages parents and guardians to...**

... learn about the community, mission, and values in service of supporting their students' education and community membership.

... communicate respectfully about concerns and partner with the GSA to solve problems and address issues constructively.

... participate as members of the GSA community of learners by asking questions and being open to new ideas and perspectives.

... familiarize themselves with this handbook and support their children in upholding the expectations for their academic work and behavior.

*The Girls' School shall admit students of any race, color, religion, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation, in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic or other school sponsored programs.*

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## FACULTY/STAFF 2024-2025

### STAFF

<b>Head of School</b>	Rebecca E. Yacono
<b>Director of Finance</b>	Melinda Madurai
<b>Director of DEIB &amp; SEL, Advisor 7<sup>th</sup></b>	Dr. Lorna Torrado
<b>Director of Admissions</b>	Neely Michaelis
<b>Director of Advancement</b>	Reagan Ward
<b>Marketing/Communications Manager</b>	Jacqueline Magno
<b>Director of Facilities</b>	Ralph Davis
<b>School Counselor</b>	Malia Wagner
<b>Student Support Coordinator</b>	Monica Santos
<b>Executive Assistant</b>	Jessica Sanchez
<b>Administrative Assistant</b>	Chandler Yanke
<b>After Care</b>	Bernadette Castillo & Jessica Workman

### FACULTY

<b>Kindergarten</b>	Meredith Hayden
<b>First Grade</b>	Terry Parks
<b>Second Grade</b>	Julia Salo
<b>Third Grade</b>	Lindsay Harris
<b>Fourth Grade</b>	Rachel Lee
<b>Lower School Science, LS Coordinator</b>	Jesse Bohnert
<b>Lower School Spanish</b>	Liliana Herrera
<b>Humanities 5/6, Advisor 5<sup>th</sup></b>	Brandon Ward
<b>Middle School Spanish, Advisor 6<sup>th</sup></b>	Ana Rie
<b>K-8 Physical Education, Advisor 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Jenny Sparks
<b>Middle School Science, Co-Advisor 6<sup>th</sup></b>	Anne Seekatz
<b>Middle School Math, Co-Advisor 5<sup>th</sup></b>	Kira Withrow
<b>Middle School Math, Co-Advisor 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Amy Heaton
<b>Humanities 7/8, Co-Advisor 7<sup>th</sup></b>	Jeremy Goheen
<b>Piano, 2nd-8th</b>	Jennifer Read
<b>Art K-8</b>	Holly Melear
<b>Strings K-8</b>	Gilles Bonneau
<b>Campus Sub/Admin+MS Support</b>	Jess Workman
<b>Lower School Teaching Assistant</b>	Bernadette Castillo
<b>Piano K-1</b>	Will Krause

## WHOM TO CONTACT

<b>Concerns about Student Learning or Work Habits</b>	Your child's teacher/advisor AND/OR Monica Santos, Student Support Coordinator
<b>Mental Health and Wellness</b>	Your child's teacher/advisor AND/OR Malia Wagner, School Counselor
<b>Social-Emotional Learning</b>	Dr. Lorna Torrado, Director of DEIB/SEL
<b>Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging</b>	
<b>High School Placement</b>	Monica Santos, Director of High School Placement
<b>Fundraising, Development, Marketing</b>	Reagan Ward, Director of Advancement
<b>Parent Volunteering</b>	
<b>GSA Events</b>	
<b>Admissions</b>	Neely Michaelis, Director of Admissions
<b>Alumnae Relations</b>	Jacqueline Magno, Marketing/Communications Manager
<b>Finances, Invoices, Tuition, Payments</b>	Melinda Madurai, Director of Finance
<b>Aftercare, After School Programs</b>	Chandler Yanke, Administrative Assistant
<b>Lunch Program</b>	
<b>Absences, Early dismissal, Tardies</b>	
<b>Big Picture Concerns (e.g., curriculum, program, school culture, etc.)</b>	Rebecca E. Yacono, Head of School

## SCHOOL DAY ATTENDANCE

Lower School (Grades K-4)

8:00am – 3:00pm\*

\*Dismissal for Lower School begins at 2:50pm.

Middle School (Grades 5-8)

8:00am – 4:00pm\*\*

\*\*Middle School dismissal is at 3:20pm on Wednesdays

### DROP-OFF/PICK-UP PROCEDURES

During drop-off and pick-up times in the morning and afternoon, please follow directions from the staff members on drop off duty or dismissal duty to keep things running smoothly:

- Enter the school entrance by turning right. This may require you to turn off of Windsor Road onto a side street and go around the block.
- Please drive safely and slowly through the neighborhood.
- Pull all the way forward in the drop-off/pick-up area. Follow directions from staff members on duty.
- **DO NOT drop off or pick up until you reach the designated area.** Stay in your car; a staff member or member of the Middle School Leadership Club will guide your child to (or from) your vehicle.
- ONLY TURN RIGHT when exiting the campus road onto Windsor.

*Note: If you need to park and walk in, please park in a visitor space if one is available (not Faculty/Staff parking). If you must park in the neighborhood, please do so courteously. As you approach the campus, please walk on the sidewalk, not the campus road*

### Arrival

Regular student drop off begins at 7:30 a.m.

Except in cases of unusually inclement weather, arriving students are expected to proceed to the front playground and remain there until the 7:55am bell, at which time they may proceed to their first class.

Because the time prior to the first period class is valuable preparation time for teachers, students are not permitted in classrooms before the bell rings at 7:55 a.m. Parents wishing to meet with teachers are asked to schedule an appointment during office hours, when teachers will have more time to adequately address parental concerns.



### **Dismissal**

A safe, orderly, and organized student dismissal at the end of each school day will require the cooperation of each last-hour teacher and parents. Teachers will accompany students from their classrooms as the students make their way to the pick-up point.

- Kindergarten and First Grade pick-up begins at 2:50 p.m.
- Second, Third, and Fourth Grade students pick up begin at 2:55 p.m.
- Middle School pick-up begins at 4:00 p.m.

If you have more than one child, use the pick-up time of the older child.

All students are supervised until pick-up. If a student has not been picked up by 3:05 p.m. (Lower School) or 4:10 p.m. (Middle School), they will be sent to After Care.

A student may leave the school only if:

1. A parent picks them up, OR
2. A parent has presented written permission in advance for another person to pick them up.

### **Attendance**

We believe that regular attendance is not only essential to the academic and social growth of individual students, but also to the growth of all our students and must be held in the highest regard. For this reason, we will not tolerate behaviors that are destructive to the community, such as repeated unexcused absences and lack of preparation for and participation in classes. Such activities call into question a family's commitment to The Girls' School of Austin.

Accurate attendance records are a Texas legal requirement; therefore, student attendance will be taken every morning. Teachers will submit absences to the main office by the end of first period (before 8:50 a.m.). A student is considered tardy if she is not in her assigned classroom by 8:00 a.m. Parents are expected to notify the school by phone or email by 8:00 a.m. if a student will be absent or if a student will be late to school.

### **Excused Absences**

Absences may be excused for illness, family emergency, and events such as religious observances, medical appointments, weddings, and graduations of immediate family members. All other absences are unexcused unless specifically approved by the Head of School.

It is understood that a student who anticipates taking an excused absence must arrange with her teachers a plan to make up missed work. In general, assignments may be picked up from the teachers if proper lead-time (e.g., one week) is given.

Students must be symptom-free and fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication before returning to school. In the case of illness that require antibiotic treatment, a student should stay home until at least 24 hours after the first dose. Other illnesses may require a doctor's note or proof of treatment before a child is allowed to return to classes, particularly with illnesses that are known to be highly contagious or when symptoms indicate a respiratory virus.

A physician's note is required when a child returns to school after an extended absence of five days or more, and a physician's note may be required for students with frequent illness or pattern of absences (*e.g.* Mondays, Fridays, days following holidays) or when the Head of School otherwise determines that a physician's note is appropriate. Please see Appendix B for the Student Leave of Absence policy that may apply in extreme situations.

### **Unexcused Absences**

An unexcused absence is determined by the Head of School. Typically, family trips and extended vacations fall into this category, and families must notify the Head of School in writing at least one week prior to the trip.

The Front Office and teachers will record excused and unexcused absences for classes during the school year.

Teachers are not required to give make-up assignments for unexcused absences. Teachers might not give credit for work completed during unexcused absences.

Missing a concert is an unexcused absence.

### **Illness or Injury During the School Day**

If a student becomes ill or is injured during the day, teachers will notify the office so that parents may be contacted for transportation home. In the event a student becomes ill during class, teachers are asked to send the child to the office

To maintain a healthy environment in our classrooms, a student who has a fever, has diarrhea, or has vomited may not remain at school. Other illnesses that warrant a student going home during the school day include pink eye, pinworm, lice, and unexplained rashes or open sores.

Students must be symptom-free and fever free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication before returning to school. In the case of illness that require antibiotic treatment, a student should stay home until at least 24 hours after the first dose.

Other illnesses may require a doctor's note or proof of treatment before a child is allowed to return to classes, particularly with illnesses that are known to be highly contagious or when symptoms indicate a respiratory virus.

### **Medical Appointments**

To the extent possible, parents are encouraged to schedule medical and dental appointments after school hours or during school vacations.

### **School Visits**

Eighth Grade students who are visiting prospective high schools need to plan in advance of their proposed visit date. Shadow visits are a great way to see a prospective school, but sudden departures of students from classes are very disruptive. Shadow visits by 8th Graders that are planned and approved in advance will be considered excused absences; otherwise, school visits to other schools will be unexcused.

### **Religious Holidays**

Parents can send a note with their students or email the office prior to the holiday absence stating how many days they will be absent. Typically, teachers will not require make-up homework, test taking, or projects on the day students return, unless a non-holiday weekend precedes or immediately follows the holiday.

### **Tardiness**

Tardiness is excused for visits to a physician (note required with date and time of visit) or hazardous driving conditions. Other circumstances are subject to approval by the Head of School. A student who is too ill to arrive to school on time should be considered too ill to attend classes that day and should stay home from school all day.

### **Academic Responsibilities Following an Absence**

Students who have been absent are responsible for obtaining assignments and completing missed work.

### **Attendance Probation**

A student who has six or more unexcused absences or twelve or more unexcused tardies (or a combination of twelve unexcused absences and tardies) in a trimester will be placed on Attendance Probation. Parents will receive notification from the Administrative Assistant when their child has four unexcused absences and/or eight unexcused tardies in a given trimester. If a student exceeds the maximum number of unexcused absences or tardies in a trimester, their parents will be contacted by the Head of School and notified that the student is on Attendance Probation.

A student who remains on Attendance Probation for two trimesters or more may not be offered a contract for the following school year. A student is removed from

Attendance Probation if the attendance record improves (fewer than six unexcused absences or tardies) the following trimester. A student who is placed on Attendance Probation in the third trimester will remain on probation for the following fall.

### **Course Credit**

To receive credit in a Middle School class, a student must attend at least 90% of the days the class is offered. A student who attends more than 75% but fewer than 90% may receive credit if she completes a plan approved by the Head of School.

### **Early Dismissal**

Parents should inform the Administrative Assistant via email, phone call, or in person if their daughter needs to leave school early, and parents must sign their daughter out before the student will be allowed to leave campus. In order to maximize time in class, the student will not be pulled from classes until the parent arrives. With that in mind, parents should build that time into planning.

If the student is returning during the day, parents are expected to sign them in upon returning. The student is responsible for informing her teachers and making up missed work on a schedule agreeable to the teacher.

### **Participation in afterschool activities or special events**

A student who is too ill to participate in classes may not attend a field trip or participate in school-sponsored after-school activities on the day they were absent from regular classes.

### **Illness prior to a concert or other evening performance**

In general, the above rule applies: a student may not participate in an evening concert or event if they were too ill to attend school during the day. Occasionally, if the student is feeling much better and was not (and is not) running a fever, an exception might be made. In this case, the parent will discuss the situation in advance with the Head of School, who may grant an exception. Students who were absent during the day and show up at the concert or event without permission will be sent home again.

## UNIFORM POLICY 2024-2025

Uniforms are required at the Girls' School of Austin, and each student is expected to adhere to the dress code. The uniform regulations are intended to help parents/guardians and students avoid any misunderstanding of the school's expectations. Our dress code ensures that students' clothing is appropriate attire for learning and representing the GSA. In addition, the uniform policy creates a more equitable and intentional learning environment by limiting distractions and divisiveness that can come with expensive/high status brands or locales. All students are expected to follow GSA's uniform policy and be clean and neat.

### **GSA Uniform Requirements:**

- All polo shirts must have the approved GSA logo.
- Cardigans, hoodies, and sweatshirts may or may not have the GSA logo, but they must be solid colored; no other words, patterns, or images are allowed. If there is a brand logo, it should be ~2 inches or smaller.
- Sweatpants and athletic wear (exercise tights, pants, or shorts) are not allowed except for PE.
- Leggings may be worn like tights, not like pants (under navy blue skirt/skort/shorts), so they can be treated like tights - colors, patterns, etc. are allowed.
- GSA students of all ages run, play, climb, etc.; all students must wear closed-toed shoes that enable them to run around. *For safety purposes, sandals, flip-flops, or other open-toed shoes may not be worn by our students.*
- Please note that outerwear (coats/jackets) worn during cold weather may be any color but may not be worn in the classroom.
- Hats may be worn outside only.

**NOTE: Parents are requested to label all articles of clothing with student's name and grade.**

<b>Dress Uniform (every Monday and for most day field trips)</b>	
Shirt	White polo shirt - long or short sleeved with GSA logo
Skort/Skirt/Shorts/Pants	Navy blue - Skirts, shorts, and skorts must be mid-thigh length
Shoes	Any athletic tennis shoes, Mary Janes, or ballet slipper-style shoes
Socks/Tights/Leggings	Personal preference
Cardigan/Hoodie/Sweatshirt	Navy (with or without GSA logo)

<b>Tuesday – Friday</b>	
Shirt	Red, Navy, Blue, White, Purple or Yellow polo shirt - long or short sleeved with GSA logo  <b>Friday Option:</b> Any official GSA Spirit Wear shirt with logo from current or past years.
Skort/Skirt/Shorts/Pants	Navy blue - Skirts, shorts, and skorts must be mid-thigh length  <b>Friday Option – 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Graders only!</b> may wear jeans or jeans shorts (regular blue jeans, no holes, not skintight, no jeggings)
Shoes	<b>Lower School:</b> Any athletic tennis shoes, Mary Janes, or ballet slipper-style shoes  <b>Middle School:</b> Any closed-toe shoes
Socks/Tights/Leggings	Personal preference
Cardigan/Hoodie/Sweatshirt	Solid-colored; optional GSA logo. No other words, patterns, or images are allowed. Brand logos must be <2 inches in size.

**P.E. Uniforms – All Grades**

Any student may change for P.E. but must change back into their uniform prior to returning to their next class.

Middle School students are required to change for P.E.

Approved P.E. attire:

- Any color bottoms
- Any color shirt (no spaghetti straps or midriffs)
- Uniform-approved hooded jacket or sweatshirt
- Athletic/tennis shoes

**Jewelry:**

For safety reasons and the potential risk of loss, students are encouraged to limit jewelry wearing to simple earrings and/or a simple necklace.

- Jewelry may be worn for religious or cultural purposes
- Students may be required to remove or tape over jewelry for P.E.
- School administration will judge the appropriateness of any questionable article of jewelry.

**Fingernail Polish/Cosmetics:**

Nail polish is discouraged but may be worn. Acrylic/fake nails are not allowed.

Nail length needs to be conducive to playing an instrument and typing on a keyboard.

Students in grades K-6 are not permitted to wear makeup.

Seventh and Eighth graders are discouraged from wearing makeup.

If worn, makeup should be subtle in appearance and limited to neutral eyeshadow, mascara, blush, and lip gloss. If a student's makeup use is overt, gaudy, or "costume-y," they will be asked to remove it.

Students are not allowed to apply cosmetics at school.

**Field Trip Attire:**

In general, students will dress in Monday dress uniform for field trips. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis, depending upon the activity. Exceptions require the approval of the Head of School.

**Concert Attire:**

For piano and strings concerts, students should wear Monday dress uniform.

Chamber ensemble members are asked to wear concert black attire and black shoes – Mary Jane or ballet slipper style, or other dress shoes – no sneakers or high heels

**Free Dress Days:**

For Middle School students, the last Wednesday of each month is Free Dress Day. All students who have not had a uniform code violation that month may participate.

Other Free Dress Days may be called by the Head of School and include the Lower School.

On Free Dress Days, clothing must follow the regular guidelines for length and neatness (finger-tip length; no rips; closed-toed shoes).

- T-shirt/sweatshirt graphics should not have inappropriate or offensive messages, including images, ads, or words that promote violence, drugs, or alcohol.
- Pajamas and costumes are also not appropriate for Free Dress Days.

**Non-compliance with uniform code:**

Any staff member may ask a student to remove or replace any articles of clothing or accessories that do not comply with our uniform code. The school administration reserves the right to authorize or prohibit any individual item of clothing, even if it is not specifically stated in the uniform code.

If a student is found to be out of compliance, a teacher or staff member will ask the student to change into uniform clothing that is on hand in the uniform closet or student cubbies; if there is no uniform clothing on hand, the school will ask that parents bring a change in outfit. The student can return to class when they are dressed in compliance with the dress code.



## **COMPUTER USE**

Each classroom in Grades 3 and up is equipped with computers for student use. Student computer use is limited to those computers designated “student computers,” and students may not use teacher or office computers.

Students and GSA Staff are expected to follow the Acceptable Use guidelines whenever they are working on assignments or tasks for GSA assignments or interacting with GSA community members. Any use described below is deemed “acceptable” and consistent with this policy. The final decision regarding whether any given use of the network or internet is acceptable lies with the Head of School in consultation with the teaching faculty and technology staff/consultants.

### **Acceptable Use...**

- ...supports and furthers GSA’s educational purposes, goals, and objectives.
- ...furthers online research related to education and instruction.
- ...is consistent with the ethical and network rules established by the school.
- ...does not violate any GSA policy.
- ...would not reflect negatively on GSA if known by the parents of GSA’s students or the public.

In addition, all e-mail communication between students and faculty must use the GSA email system.

### **Unacceptable Use**

Any of the following uses is deemed “unacceptable” and a violation of the User Agreement and this policy. The final decision regarding whether any given use of the network or Internet is unacceptable lies with the Head of School.

- Using, viewing, or participating in any third-party social networking site (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, X (Twitter)) unless under the supervision of an adult.
- Participating in any chat room or chat application that is not sponsored and overseen by GSA.
- Unauthorized use of copyrighted material, including violating GSA’s software licensing agreements.
- Posting or distribution of threatening, discriminatory, harassing, violent, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate material.
- Personal, political use to advocate for or against a candidate, office-holder, political party, or political position. Research or electronic communications regarding political issues or candidates shall not be a violation, provided the activity was conducted to fulfill an assignment for a class credit and otherwise complied with all GSA requirements and policies.

- Tampering, i.e., accessing, reading, deleting, copying, or modifying with, the electronic mail or stored documents of other users, regardless of where the message is being displayed or stored.
- “Hacking,” i.e., attempting unauthorized access to any computer whether within the school’s network or outside it. Using another student’s login information is considered hacking.
- Any use that would be unlawful under state or federal law.
- Unauthorized disclosure, use, or distribution of personal identification information regarding students or employees.
- Forgery of electronic mail messages or transmission of unsolicited junk e-mail chain messages.
- Use that violates the student code of conduct.
- Use related to commercial activities or for commercial gain for a student or teacher.

The network resources are owned by The Girls’ School of Austin and these systems (including e-mail and internet access) are monitored. Any student violating these provisions is subject to loss of network access and disciplinary measures consistent with those outlined in the student conduct code, and/or referral for criminal prosecution.

The Girls’ School of Austin makes no guarantee of any kind, whether expressed or implied, for the services it is providing. GSA will not be responsible for any damages a user may suffer, including loss of data or interruptions in service. GSA will not be responsible for the accuracy or quality of information obtained through GSA technology resources or the Internet.

### **Student Laptop Use**

In addition to the above rules, the following rules apply to laptop use on campus. Use of a school laptop is a privilege, and students who violate this policy will lose their privilege for a period to be determined by the Head of School.

- Only GSA laptops may be used on campus by GSA students unless specific permission is granted by the Head of School.
- Students may be asked to sign out/sign in their laptops each time they use them.
- Families will be financially responsible for repairing or replacing school devices that are damaged or broken due to the result of mishandling or misuse of the device by a student.

### **Social Media**

Faculty may not request or accept friend requests from current students.  
Faculty may not follow current students on social media.

GSA may post images and work of current students with publicity authority. Publicity authority pertains to official GSA outlets and not to personal pages. Photos of students and student work may be shared on Class Dojo or the GSA website. Grade level groups on Class Dojo are for parents, guardians, and faculty only. Teachers will not post pictures of students or their work on their personal social media platforms.

Community members are expected to get explicit permission from others before posting their photos or comments on social media platforms or sending photos and information to others.

## **ACADEMIC POLICIES**

### **Homework Assignments**

Homework assignments at GSA serve several purposes: reinforcement for classroom learning, pre-learning for class work, as well as time for independent work such as writing or reading. In Lower School, homework also helps build the scholarly habits necessary for sustained academic work in later years.

Teachers may choose the method for posting homework assignments and parents and students will be informed about how they are expected to record or access assignments. Developing a system for recording, and then following through on assignments is a valuable skill.

It is our shared belief that excessive amounts of homework are unnecessary. A *reasonable* amount of homework will be assigned, and each teacher will take into consideration the possibility/probability of assignments by other teachers.

- The time a student is typically expected to spend on homework assignments will range according to the student's grade level, with Kindergarteners receiving approximately 15 minutes a night and Seventh and Eighth Graders receiving up to two hours a night. Students might spend more or less time, depending on projects, due dates, and time management.
- The times listed above do not include practice time on the student's musical instrument. Practice time varies by grade level and difficulty of repertoire (particularly in piano since it is individually chosen).
- Students in grades K-4 are not assigned weekend homework.
- In general, there is no homework for students over holidays. Teachers are asked to report any holiday assignments to the Head of School before giving them. In addition, the teacher is asked to contact students' parents to notify

them of the assignment their daughter will be expected to complete during a holiday break.

Completion of homework is required. Parents will be notified of a trend in incomplete or missing homework. Teachers may assess a penalty for late work (points deducted from assignment, for example), but the teacher's policy must be announced in advance to students and parents.

### **Make-Up Tests**

It is a student's responsibility to meet with the teacher to reschedule missed tests or other assignments. Teachers will designate a time during the school day or after school (K-4 teachers must be sure to let parents know). If a student does not reschedule and make-up the test within a week of the absence (seven calendar days or five class days), she will receive a zero for the test grade or assignment.

### **Academic Support**

During the course of the school year, should a student's learning progress or academic performance become a concern, teachers will use a variety of strategies to support the student's academic growth with the goal of providing the support the student needs in order to complete the GSA course of study. In these cases, parents will receive timely communication from the school. In addition, when the need for support is identified, the teacher will bring the matter to the attention of the Student Support Coordinator, Counselor, and the Head of School with the goal of developing a Classroom Strategies Plan based on teacher observations, student work and classroom assessments, and insights provided by parents.

If tutoring is advised, it will be arranged outside of regular school hours and conducted by a qualified tutor, unless the Head of School approves on-campus tutoring. The Student Support Coordinator will work with the classroom teacher and the tutor to schedule time and space. Parents are urged to promptly follow through with the recommended actions.

In certain instances, if the implemented classroom support plan exceeds the student's needs, the classroom teacher/Middle School advisor will partner with the Student Support Coordinator, School Counselor, or Head of School to discuss next steps. If the team determines that educational testing would provide further insight into the student's learning needs, parents will be asked to initiate testing and provide the report from that assessment.

Most educational testing reports include recommendations based on test scores and any potential diagnoses. To the extent the GSA is able to act on the recommendations within the context of the curriculum and school mission, every effort will be made to do so. In rare cases, a student's educational needs exceed the resources and programs offered by the school. In those situations, it is the goal of

the faculty and staff to support the student and family in identifying an appropriate educational program or setting that will address the student's academic challenges.

## **GRADING AND REPORTING**

### **Conferences**

Parent-teacher or parent-advisor conferences are scheduled for all parents in the Fall before distribution of the first trimester review. In addition, conferences may be scheduled at the request of the parent or the advisor/teacher at any time.

### **Trimester Reviews**

In November, February and after the last day of school, written performance reviews on each student's academic and social progress are sent home to parents. These Trimester Reviews are designed to give students, parents, and teachers as much information as possible about a student's academic experience and performance. Reviews are intended, as well, to provide an opportunity for the student to reflect on her own learning and identify goals for continued improvement.

### **Grading Procedures in Grades K-4**

Academic achievement is evaluated at the elementary grade levels by written teacher comments, and academic performance is assessed using the following language:

S - Secure	The student can apply the skill or concept correctly and independently. They are progressing successfully.
D - Developing	The student shows some understanding and can work independently. However, errors and misunderstandings still occur. Reminders, hints, or suggestions are necessary to develop a secure understanding.
B - Beginning	The student is just beginning to understand this skill or concept. Assistance is needed to complete tasks and develop a secure understanding.
I - Improvement Needed	The child is experiencing difficulty with this skill or concept. Outside assistance may be needed.
N/A - Not Assessed	The standard has either not yet been introduced or is not yet ready for formal assessment.

Student Behavior, Work Habits, and SEL Skills are assessed using the following language:

DC	Demonstrates Consistently
DO	Demonstrates Occasionally
DR	Demonstrates Rarely

Trimester Reviews for Lower School students in grades K-4 include improvement goals written by teachers.

### **Grading Procedures in Grades 5-8**

In Middle School grades (5-8), academic achievement is evaluated by the letters A, B, C, D and F with + or – representing performance at the upper or lower end of the range. Teachers are required to indicate both a numeric grade and a letter grade.

In Fifth Grade, students do not receive letter grades on their report cards until the 3rd Trimester. It is important that Fifth Graders have time to acclimate to the Middle School rotating schedule and multiple teachers and to develop the work habits that increase their academic success before they have letter grades added to their report cards.

The grading scale at The Girls' School of Austin is as follows:

A+	97-100
A	93-96
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Students whose class work is incomplete at review time will receive a letter grade of "I" (Incomplete) which may be changed when required work is turned in, no later than two weeks following the last day of the trimester.

### **Specials Classes**

At all grade levels and where applicable, a grade is given in Music, Art, and PE are based on the following criteria:

- The student comes to class promptly, with assigned work completed/prepared and correct class materials, ready to begin work.
- The student pays attention in class, listens to the teacher or student who is speaking.

- The student contributes positively to class discussion, answers questions raised by the teacher or by a student and shares ideas and insights with the class
- The student makes an independent effort to learn. In Strings, for example, “independent effort” includes practicing outside of class consistently.

### **Promotion and Retention**

Advancement to the next grade level is subject to the student’s readiness for advancement and the observations of her GSA teachers that she can comfortably do satisfactory work at the higher level. Parents will be notified in writing when a student’s academic performance is such that they are at risk of retention.

If a teacher becomes concerned that a student might not be able to proceed to the next grade, that information should be shared with the Student Support Coordinator and the Head of School as soon as evidence of the concern arises. The Head of School, teachers, and parents will meet to seek possible remedies. GSA policy holds that a student is at risk for retention or dismissal if she has not demonstrated sufficient academic and social growth to capably meet the demands of the next grade OR if the student’s educational challenges require a level of support or modification that precludes them from completing the school’s full educational program.

### **Academic Probation**

When a Middle School Student’s grades and academic progress become a concern, the section above (“Academic Difficulties”) will be followed; faculty and staff will work with the student and her parents to support her growth and learning. Nevertheless, a Middle School student’s academic challenges often manifest in low grades.

A Middle School student will be placed on Academic Probation if she receives one or more grades of D+ or lower in a core subject (Humanities - Language Arts/Social Studies, Math, Science, Spanish) at the end of a trimester. If the student remains on Academic Probation for two or more successive terms, depending upon the severity of the situation, the Head of School will initiate a conference with the student’s parents and advisor to discuss the most appropriate course of action for the subsequent school year. Possible outcomes include cancellation or non-renewal of a contract for the next school year or the addition of conditions for return for the fall, such as summer academic work or tutoring.

### **Testing – Standardized Achievement**

As part of the ongoing evaluation of the GSA academic program and to help advise parents and students, students in Grades 3 through 8 take the CTP-4

(Comprehensive Testing Program) achievement tests each spring. Standardized test results are only one indicator of a student's abilities and progress and are used as tools to help teachers to identify skill areas requiring attention. At no time are such scores used in determining student grades in a course or in isolation to determine continued enrollment at the school.

### **Academic Honesty**

Academic honesty is of critical importance at GSA. Any violation of the academic honesty code is considered academic misconduct and will be addressed accordingly.

Academic honesty means:

1. A student completes and submits only her own work.
2. A student does not allow another student to copy her work.
3. A student does not plagiarize—use another person's written work or ideas—without giving credit to the author or creator, including AI tools like Chat GPT.
4. A student does not forge a parent's required signature.
5. A student does not falsify information intended for parents or teachers.
6. A student completes tests and quizzes without the use of any unauthorized sources, including unauthorized notes, another student's paper, or a digital device.
7. A student completes tests and quizzes in silence without showing work to another person during the test.
8. A student refrains from sharing information about a test with a student who has not yet taken it.
9. A student does not program formulas, equations, or words into the memory of a calculator or handheld computer device.
10. A student does not conceal academic dishonesty by others and reports such information to her teacher.

Teachers will make it clear when AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, and the like are appropriate tools and when they are prohibited. Use of such tools without prior teacher approval and clarification is prohibited and considered a violation of the academic honesty code.

The determination that a student has engaged in academic dishonesty shall be based on the judgment of the classroom teacher or other supervising professional employee, taking into consideration written materials, observation, or information from students. Students found to have engaged in academic dishonesty will be referred to the Head of School and an appropriate penalty established, up to and including dismissal.



## **SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL GROWTH AND WELLNESS**

### **Behavior Guidelines**

GSA is committed to maintaining an environment in which all members of the community interact with mutual respect and cooperation. The school is committed to being an institution free of bullying and harassment based on factors including, but not limited to, race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, or medical condition. The school will not tolerate harassment of students, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, or others. The school will take appropriate action against any person whose behavior is found to be in violation of this policy.

See Appendix A for detailed Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures.

### **Self-Discipline**

GSA's policy is to have minimal rules with maximum observance. Each student is expected to treat their classmates and their teachers with kindness, consideration, and respect. Teachers, staff, and administrators serve as role models of this behavior. In addition, adults in the community provide direct guidelines and redirection when needed.

Classroom routines such as how students move between classes, perform classroom jobs, excuse themselves to use bathroom and water facilities, and participate in class discussions will be clearly established at the beginning of each school year by the students' teachers.

Appropriate behavior is the norm at GSA, and the rare incidence of academic or behavioral misconduct is dealt with quietly and respectfully but firmly. Corporal punishment is not a tool for disciplinary action at GSA.

Repeated acts of minor misconduct such as interfering with the instructional process, disobeying the dress code, not following proper procedures, being in an unauthorized area, being disrespectful to another member of the community, or any act of major misconduct such as use or possession of drugs or alcohol, possession of weapons, vandalism, threats of violence, and chronic bullying can be grounds for dismissal. See Appendix A for our detailed Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures.

Parents are notified if a child has a persistent behavioral problem. When this happens, parents are expected to partner with the school in a cooperative effort to understand and change disruptive behavior patterns. The Head of School may recommend counseling support through our School Counselor or outside professional help when she deems such action necessary. There may be times when

a student's mental health must take precedence over her academic journey. Please see Appendix B for the Student Leave of Absence Policy.

### **Human Development Program**

At The Girls' School we believe that a thorough understanding of how our bodies work is empowering. We also believe that our students need to be well prepared to make safe and healthy decisions in their approaching adolescence and beyond. Therefore, we employ a comprehensive health education program in every grade that includes developmentally appropriate information on human growth and development, nutrition and exercise, alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse, body image, personal skills, digital citizenship, relationships, consent, sexual health and behavior, and cultural influences. We strive to create an environment in which students are comfortable asking questions and engaging in candid age-appropriate and context-appropriate discussions on any topic.

### **Social-Emotional Learning**

From the moment students arrive on campus until they leave at the end of the day, they are immersed in an environment that encourages their social-emotional growth. Not only are these skills integrated into classroom dynamics and academic curriculum, they are also taught specifically in large and small group settings.

Examples of our Social-Emotional Learning practices include Community Meeting, social and emotional skill building, bi-monthly DEIB/SEL lessons in Lower School classrooms led by our Director of SEL/DEIB and School Counselor, Middle School Advisory lessons, and Sister Group activities to name just a few.

Themes that run through the entire K-8 program are based on the competencies laid out by the Coalition for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

These themes include:

- Self-Awareness – understanding one's emotions, thoughts, values, identity, and behavior.
- Self-Management – understanding how to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behavior with specific support strategies.
- Social Awareness – understanding and empathizing with other people, including those from different backgrounds.
- Relationship Skills – understanding how to navigate peer relationships, maintain healthy friendships, and resolve conflict.
- Responsible Decision-Making – understanding how to make mindful and safe choices across environments, including online environments and environments with less adult supervision.

### **Parent Education**

Recognizing the difficulty of the shared work of raising children, many of the workshops held for parents deal with topics related to child development and parenting in an increasingly complicated world. Sessions are led by faculty, staff, and guest speakers. Workshops are held throughout the year, and we highly encourage parents to participate.

In addition, resources such as articles and podcast episodes are shared throughout the year in blog posts and newsletters. This “on-demand” parent education provides wisdom and flexibility.

### **School Counselor**

GSA employs a full-time School Counselor to support students’ emotional and mental wellbeing insofar as it impacts their social and academic success at school. Teachers will communicate with the student’s advisor, the School Counselor, and the Head of School if they have concerns about a student’s emotional or mental health or social interactions. The Counselor is available to evaluate such situations and to make recommendations to students and parents for support and treatment. Families or students may also contact the School Counselor directly to request school-based support or support locating a needed community mental health resource.

This counseling support is available to aid the student in coping with problems that interfere with appropriate academic progress and social development. These services are not intended to address learning disabilities or remedy serious psychological disturbances or other problems requiring extensive or long-term attention. In most circumstances, regular school-based counseling sessions for a student may not exceed two trimesters in a school year. If the School Counselor determines the student still needs substantial counseling support, she will work with the student and family to find services outside of school.

It is the expectation of the school that recommendations/requests for outside counseling be honored by the student’s parents. If a student’s mental health puts their own or others’ mental or physical safety in jeopardy, the Head of School will initiate a conversation with the student’s parents about whether The Girls’ School is the appropriate educational setting for the student.

## **SECURITY, SAFETY, AND EMERGENCIES**

### **Facilities Use Policy**

The Girls' School buildings, grounds and other facilities are for the benefit of students, faculty, and staff and will be used for educational purposes consistent with the mission of the GSA. Use of the school facilities must be approved by the Head of School.

### **Building Access**

For students' safety, parents must never leave children at the school or at a school event without a staff member present.

The main office is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., or until the last child leaves. During the school day, visitors to campus must sign in at the front office, scan their ID, and wear a nametag when on campus. Parents are asked to refrain from visiting classrooms before school or during the school day, unless scheduled with the teacher in advance. Students and parents are not allowed in any part of the school building before or after hours unless supervised by a GSA staff member.

### **Medications for Students**

Medications for students, prescription or non-prescription (including herbal remedies), will be administered to students only when it is absolutely necessary and only if it cannot be administered at home. As a general rule, only administrative personnel may administer medications to students; however, teachers are permitted to administer medicines in an emergency or on a field trip.

All medications must be in their original container and be accompanied by the appropriate form (Authorization for Administration of Medication), completely filled out and signed by a parent. Medications are to be given to an adult by the parent and may not be sent with the student in a backpack, lunch box, or coat pocket, or be kept by the student at school (Exception: Asthma medication/inhalers may be kept by the student, but the authorization form must be on file and the teacher made aware that this medication is in the student's possession.) All medications must be labeled with the student's name, date, instructions, and if prescription, the physician's name. Students with severe allergies should keep an Epi-Pen or Benadryl in the main office.

The school maintains a first-aid kit in the main office, which contains general medications (i.e., Tylenol Junior, Tums, etc.); however, we do not dispense any medication without prior authorization from a parent.

In all instances, all employees should refrain from discussing a child's medication or medical condition absent a compelling need to do so and then only in private.

### **Campus Dog Policy**

Well-socialized dogs are welcome to visit the campus with permission if they remain under the control of their owners and as long as they are not a distraction to events, programs, or academics. In addition, we ask that parents do not bring dogs when they are coming to campus for a lunch visit. In the event that any visitor's dog demonstrates unprovoked aggression of any kind, the dog will no longer be welcome on campus.

### **Accidents**

Teachers are asked to request assistance whenever it would be useful or necessary, whether in the classroom or on the playground. Getting assistance or aid for an injured person is the priority, and any community member is authorized to make the determination to call 911. In the event of an accident or injury, the teacher on duty should notify the main office immediately. The Head of School should be notified as soon as reasonably possible.

The following procedures should be followed:

- On the playground, children are expected to notify the teacher(s) on duty of an accident or injury.
- In the event of minor injuries, the teacher on duty will assign a student to accompany the injured child to the office for first aid treatment.
- The Head of School or a delegate will contact an injured student's parents if the injury requires any form of treatment beyond the most basic of first aid.
- The Head of School or the delegate will call 911 for serious injuries of any kind, and parents will be contacted immediately.

Student Emergency Information Sheets are on file in the main office and contain contact information as well as hospital and physician preferences.

Any incident involving any injury that requires any form of treatment beyond the most basic of first aid should be recorded using an Incident Form, which is available in the main office.

### **Child Abuse and Neglect**

Texas state law requires GSA staff to report immediately any suspected neglect or sexual, physical, or emotional abuse of a child. Without hesitation, a confidential report will be made directly to the Child Protective Services (CPS) division of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, within 24 hours of disclosure or suspicion. Parents are not notified by the school in the event a concern is reported to CPS.

**In addition to the guidelines outlined in prior sections, the following procedures and policies are in place for emergencies:**

### **Emergency Closings**

Except for regularly scheduled holidays, The Girls' School of Austin will be open Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM. In the event of inclement weather, national crisis, or other emergency, either prior to the start of school, or in the event the school will close early, parents will be notified through our One Call Now system. If possible, information will be posted on the website.

### **Emergency Plans**

Teachers are informed of emergency procedures at the beginning of each school year and practice drills with students throughout the year. Specifics about the emergency response plan are intentionally kept confidential to prevent anyone with ill intent from utilizing knowledge of the plans to do harm.

In the event of a local or national emergency, teachers will be notified immediately. Teachers are asked to refrain from sharing specific information with students unless or until advised to do so. Computers, televisions, and radios should be turned off upon notification of an emergency.

In the event an emergency within the school necessitates total or partial closure, threatens the safety and well-being of students, and/or interferes in the normal operation of the school, the following emergency procedure will be followed:

- The report of an emergency shall be directed to the Head of School's office.
- The Head of School or a delegate shall contact the Austin Police Department and the Department of Emergency Services when appropriate.
- The Head of School or a delegate will contact parents to pick up children, if advisable.
- Community members should not discuss the events or response of the school with outside parties, including media. Such inquiries should be directed to the Director of Advancement or the Head of School.

### **Open Carry Policy**

Texas Penal Code sec. 46.03 prohibits firearms on the premises of a school, unless otherwise permitted by written authorization of the school. At GSA, any item classified as a weapon may not be brought onto campus, or to any school function off campus, or in any vehicle being used to transport students for a school trip or activity. No concealed or open carry firearms are allowed, even if you have a concealed carry license. The only exception to this policy is in the case of licensed, armed security under contract with the school. Licensure and insurance of the contracted company and individuals will be verified by the school.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

### **Recess**

All Lower School students enjoy recess outdoors whenever the weather permits and should have appropriate outerwear when necessary. Indoor recess will be allowed for special circumstances such as freezing temperatures or below or other inclement weather conditions.

### **Lunch and Snack**

Our students eat outdoors, picnic style. During rain, extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions, students will eat in the classrooms. Students are encouraged to eat a balanced diet that supports overall physical and cognitive wellness. We ask that no soda or high-caffeine/high-energy drinks be brought into the school. Students are encouraged to use refillable bottles and to minimize waste. Neither refrigeration, a microwave oven, nor hot water is available for use by students.

After the first few weeks of the school year - following Back-to-School Nights - Parents and other guests are welcome to join their child for lunch occasionally, when the weather is nice. Guests are asked to leave at the start of recess (12:00pm) because healthy social development requires independent play time with peers.

Students should also pack a healthy mid-morning snack. Although a snack is included in the after-school program, students with restricted diets may wish to pack their own after-school snack. Students will also need a snack on half days.

As a safety precaution, we ask that students not share food. In addition, any food that is made available at school-wide events must be nut free. Any food brought for classroom consumption must include an ingredient list. Parents should check with their child's teacher before bringing snacks. More restrictive "nut" policies may be necessary from time to time, depending upon the needs of our students.

### **Middle School Hang-Out Space**

During lunch recess, Middle School students may enjoy time on the playground, or they may stay in one of the designated Middle School "hang-out spaces," which includes the upstairs balcony and roof decks. Unless working with a teacher on a school-related project, students may not use electronic devices—no cameras, video, laptops, iPods, smartwatches, etc.

### **Aftercare**

After school care—called "aftercare"—is available Monday through Friday from 3:15 to 5:30 p.m. Students are automatically placed in aftercare if they are not picked up by 3:05 p.m. for grades K-4 or by 4:10 p.m. for grades 5-8. Students in grades K-4



can attend aftercare from 3:05 – 4:05 p.m. at no cost if they have an older sibling in middle school.

All students are expected to be picked up by 5:30 p.m. Parents should call the school if they anticipate their child is going to be picked up later than 5:30 p.m. Parents will be billed \$1.00 per minute that they arrive past 5:30pm, following the digital clock on the sign out iPads.

### **Contacting GSA**

The GSA office phone will be answered and/or messages checked between 8:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday (or until the last child leaves campus). If you need to contact the aftercare coordinator, please call the GSA main phone number.

### **Gifts to Teachers**

During the winter holiday season and at the end of the year, students may wish to express good wishes to teachers and staff members, and the habit of gift-giving can be a lovely family custom. The expression of good wishes, thanks, or holiday greetings is entirely voluntary. If a class wishes to present a group gift to a teacher or staff member, participation must be voluntary and anonymous.

Individual gifts with excessive monetary value are inappropriate. Not only do they make faculty and staff uncomfortable, they convey a perceived intent of an expectation of special treatment or bias. Parents wishing to show their gratitude or support of a staff member are encouraged to give to the Firebird Fund in that staff member's honor. In addition, sincere personal letters or cards go a long way in showing appreciation to the adults who support your child's growth.

### **Celebrations**

The Girls' School of Austin welcomes and celebrates the diversity of its community. As a non-sectarian private school, GSA has the unique opportunity to deal creatively and sensitively with varying ethnic, economic, religious, and socio-cultural perspectives. The richness of our diverse culture provides the conditions for learning from one another, for respecting each other's differences, and for building a caring and cooperative educational community. While GSA does not promote any particular religious or moral outlook, neither does it inhibit religious belief or non-belief. For that reason, our policy supports those seasonal, cultural, or religious activities that may serve an educational purpose for all students.

### **Inclusive Invitations**

The Girls' School of Austin expects that students will not be left out of class gatherings. If more than half of the class is invited, then we expect the whole class to be invited. We understand that not all students will share the same level of



friendship with every one of their classmates. We are a small community, and conversations about gatherings that exclude just a few students can be devastating to the culture and connectivity within a classroom or parent group.

Students will not be permitted to pass out invitations in class that do not include all classmates.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### **Commitment To Communication**

Communication is key to working effectively as a community to support each other and the students. Faculty and staff make every effort to respond to emails and phone calls in a timely manner, with the understanding that the “day-to-day” life of a school doesn’t always correspond to regular business hours. Responses within 24-48 business hours are a goal, and we encourage parents, guardians, and students to follow up if you haven’t heard back from a staff member within that time frame.

Phone messages may be left for a teacher through the main office, and the teacher will return the call as soon as possible (generally within 24 hours).

Each faculty member has an email address and checks messages periodically throughout the day. Email is often the best way to get in touch with a teacher. Please keep such messages brief; the real conversation should be face-to-face. Email is not an appropriate medium for discussion.

### **Partnering to Support Healthy Child Development**

Childhood and early adolescence is a time of dramatic change as our students grow up, get to know themselves, and establish greater independence, competence, and confidence. When students enter the Middle School in particular, “their lives crackle with the energy of change as they begin to establish a sense of physical and emotional identity\*.” That “energy of change” is expected, and it often comes with behaviors and thoughts that are as confusing to the child as they are to their grownups. We often encourage GSA students of all ages to “tell a trusted adult” when they are in a tricky situation or are having a challenging moment, and those situations and moments take on a variety of forms.

At times, their trusted adult is a GSA staff member, and in keeping with our commitment to empowering girls to advocate for themselves, every effort is made to give the child the agency to tell her own story, particularly when she is exploring aspects of her identity such as relationships with family members, friendships, gender, sexuality, etc. Teachers, advisors, and school counselors encourage and coach students to develop the skills and courage to share challenges and stressors with their parents versus keeping them a secret. In cases where the student’s hesitancy to tell their parents is an obstacle to the family relationship or to the

student getting the support they need, school personnel will communicate clearly with parents. We strive to balance empowering student voice with the parent-faculty partnership in support of student well-being, with a keen eye to the child's age and stage of development.

If a staff member is concerned that a student will harm herself or others, that staff member will communicate with the head of school and the child's parents immediately.

*\*from Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development Ages 4-14. by Chip Wood.*

### **Parent Concerns**

We ask that parents direct questions, concerns and praise to their daughter's teacher. If there are problems that cannot be resolved, parents should consult with the Head of School. If, after discussion with the Head of School, a parent feels an area of concern warrants the attention of the Board of Trustees, a written request for review by the Board should be submitted to the office to be forwarded to the Chair of the Board of Trustees. Alternatively, a written request for review can be emailed to the Chair of the Board of Trustees at [boardchair@thegirlsschool.org](mailto:boardchair@thegirlsschool.org). Upon receipt of the request, the Chair will determine the best course of action and will follow up with the parent. Note that the Board of Trustees of The Girls' School of Austin does not make it a practice to respond to anonymous communications about operations of the school, as they cannot be effectively responded to.

### **Students and Personal Electronic Devices**

Students are not permitted to bring or use personal electronic devices on campus. This rule extends to cellphones/smartphones, smartwatches, laptops, tablets, etc.. Cell phones may not be used by students on school premises at any time for any reason.\* If a student needs to use a phone to contact a parent, students may use the designated phone in the main office with permission of a staff member.

Phones are distractions from learning and from the community. Students leave classes under the pretense of going to lockers or the restroom in order to check their phones. In addition, the presence of phones that can record images and sound can be barriers to healthy risk taking. This policy is intended to prevent students from taking and posting videos and photos of each other, other students, and staff.

Parents can contact their children by leaving messages at the office or emailing their students.

Any staff member who sees a student with a cell phone or other personal electronic device even if it is not in use—will confiscate the phone for the rest of that school day and deliver it to the office. The student can pick up her phone at the end of the

day. If a student is found with a cell phone a second time, it will be confiscated and the student's parent will have to come to the office to claim it.

If a staff member observes a student using their phone during dismissal, the student will be instructed to put it away until they are picked up and reminded of the policy. If possible, the staff member should remind the student's parent of the phone policy when the parent arrives to pick up their child.

*If a student must have access to a cell phone after school, the phone must be left at the front desk and can be picked up as she is leaving campus for the day.*

*\*The only exception would be a life-threatening medical issue such as diabetes.*

## **STUDENT RECORDS, TUITION, AND FEES**

### **Immunizations and Health**

New health forms must be completed for all students each year. By order of the Department of Health and Human Services of the State of Texas, those students unable to produce a current immunization record by the first day of school will not be allowed to enter school until the appropriate records or the appropriate objection affidavits are received by the GSA office. GSA requires vision and hearing screening exams of students in accordance with Department of Health and Human Services requirements. These exams are offered by the school at a nominal fee, but parents may opt to have these exams conducted by their physician.

### **Requests for Copies of Transcripts**

Requests for copies of transcripts must come directly from the student's parent via email or hard copy signed letter, directed to the Head of School. Once an alum is over the age of eighteen, they may submit the request themselves. Records of students will not be released if there are any outstanding fees or past due tuition.

### **Payment of Tuition and Fees**

All students are required to have a signed Girls' School of Austin Enrollment Contract on file with the school office per contract terms. Careful consideration must be given to this legal document. Tuition payments may be made by electing one of the following payment plans: annual payment, semi-annual payments, or monthly (for ten months) payments. Tuition covers most school-sponsored field trips, with the exception of the Eighth Grade class trip, which sometimes requires additional fundraising.

Tuition does not include incidental expenses, uniforms, or certain optional events. GSA requires students to enroll in piano or strings and fees for those classes are charged as follows: piano fees are \$990 for the academic year, and parents must pay a rental fee/or purchase price for the instrument and accessories required to

participate in the strings program. Tuition does not cover optional after school program (classes) or After Care.

Parents/guardians electing to pay tuition monthly will pay through FACTs Management Service. Families electing to pay monthly may obtain an enrollment form from the school office or by contacting FACTs directly at 1-800-539-9055 and [www.factsmgt.com](http://www.factsmgt.com). Enrollment of a student at GSA obligates parents to pay the full tuition for the year.

Non-payment of tuition on time is grounds for dismissal. Records will not be released until all fees are paid, and students whose accounts are not current will be unable to start school or take examinations.

### **Re-Enrollment**

Contracts for the following school year are sent to families of current students by early February with a firm deadline for return. The Board of Trustees votes each year on the rate of increase for the tuition and fee schedule, and each current and prospective family is notified of the increase before the contract deadline. Families who withdraw their student after signing the contract are still responsible for paying the tuition for the subsequent school year.

The Girls' School of Austin reserves the right not to offer a contract to any student or family whose presence is considered by the school to be detrimental to either the students or the school.

### **Withdrawal During the School Year**

The Girls' School of Austin reserves the right to insist on the withdrawal of any student or family whose presence is considered by the school to be detrimental to either the students or the school. The terms of the GSA enrollment and re-enrollment contracts require tuition to be paid, regardless of reason for non-completion of the school year.

### **School Supplies and Instructional Materials**

A list of required school supplies and summer assignments are provided to students and parents in early summer.

## **VOLUNTEERING AND FUNDRAISING**

### **Fundraising**

At The Girls' School of Austin, fundraising provides essential support for every aspect of school life. It helps us provide an innovative education for our students. It helps us support the salaries and benefits for our outstanding faculty and staff. It helps increase the socioeconomic diversity of our community by contributing to our financial aid budget. It helps us maintain our beautiful campus. All of these are expensive, but essential, elements of our school.

The school invites gifts from parents, alums, faculty, grandparents, and friends to balance the operating budget and close the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating each GSA student. As is the case with many independent schools, tuition and fees do not cover the full cost of education. Tuition accounts for about 85% of the cost of offering a rigorous, well-rounded GSA education, while fundraising accounts for the other 15%. It is exceedingly rare for independent schools in the U.S. to charge exactly what it costs to educate an individual student, and fundraising programs exist in part to help keep tuition lower than it might otherwise be.

We have two major fundraising efforts each year at the GSA: the Firebird Fund which is our Annual Fund campaign in the Fall, and the Spring Gala. Financial gifts given through the Firebird Fund and Spring Gala are vital to the continued strength of our program.

We strive to always be direct and transparent in our fundraising efforts. You can see more detailed information about our fundraising philosophies, specific campaigns, and how these funds support the GSA in our Fundraising FAQ document found on the "Support" section of our website.

Fundraising for other organizations is not permitted on campus. If support or collaboration is desired, we prefer to assist other organizations through direct service (tree planting vs. raising money for trees). Approval is determined by the Head of School.

### **Volunteering**

The GSA relies on family support to maintain the quality and quantity of activities offered to our students. The time shared with the school contributes to the richness of the environment and directly impacts the student experience. Parents are encouraged to sign up for volunteer activities at the back-to-school open house events in the Fall, as well as online (<https://thegirlsschool.org/volunteer/>) throughout the year. For more information about how to support the GSA by volunteering time, contact Reagan Ward in the Advancement Office ([development@thegirlsschool.org](mailto:development@thegirlsschool.org)).

Some of the volunteer opportunities available:

- Volunteer to help with a school event (See Appendix C)
  - School events would not be possible without our volunteers! There are numerous opportunities to participate - including times outside of regular working hours and tasks that can be completed off-campus.
- Share your knowledge and talent by speaking to a class or parent group
  - Please make note of your area of expertise on our volunteer form (<https://thegirlsschool.org/volunteer/>) or discuss your ideas with the Head of School.
- Assist with a classroom project
- Chaperone a field trip
- Organize the GSA Free Uniform Closet
- And many more!

### **Driving and Chaperoning for School Field Trips**

In the interest of students' safety, parents volunteering to drive for or chaperone field trips must complete a background check and provide a valid driver's license. Drivers will provide the front office with proof of car insurance.

#### **Rules for chaperones and drivers:**

- Cell phone use and texting is not permitted while driving GSA students.
- If a parent appears impaired or otherwise unable to drive safely or supervise appropriately on the day of the field trip, they will not be permitted to chaperone or drive students.
- A student may not sit in the front seat of any vehicle without parental permission.
- Parent drivers may not make stops on the way to an event or on the way back to school from an event.
- Field trips are not family outings; siblings and other family members may not attend GSA field trips.
- The number of seat belts must equal or exceed the number of students being transported, and students must wear seat belts correctly when they are in a vehicle that is in motion.
- GSA students may not leave campus with GSA faculty or staff without permission from the student's parents; parents will be notified in advance of field trips other than short walks in the neighborhood—such as the park or library.

## APPENDIX A

### ANTI-BULLYING POLICY AND PRACTICES

**Philosophy:** It is the policy of the Girls' School of Austin that student safety comes first and that students be able to attend school in a safe environment that is free from bullying. Bullying and harassment of others has no place in the school environment and will not be tolerated. Bullying is anti-social behavior and violates the type of community and culture that The Girls' School honors and cultivates. Bullying may be commonplace in our culture, but we do not believe it is healthy or normal and we feel compelled to work to protect the type of community that is the cornerstone of The Girls' School. Positive peer relations and the ability to interact with community members peacefully and effectively is a necessary life skill. Bullying is a learned behavior and if it can be learned, it can be examined and changed.

Our goal is a culture of acceptance, empathy, tolerance, and compassion wherein all children and adults feel safe. Bullying behaviors are in direct conflict with that goal and will not be tolerated.

Bullying...

- is aggressive behavior that is intended to hurt, control, intimidate, or humiliate the target
- can be physical, verbal or emotional
- is carried out repeatedly over time
- occurs in relationship with a power imbalance

There are four types of bullying.

- Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things. Verbal bullying includes, but is not limited to, name-calling, inappropriate sexual comments or suggestions, taunting, belittling, cruel criticism, slurs, and anonymous notes.
- Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes, but is not limited to, excluding, shunning, isolating, ignoring, malicious rumors, and embarrassing others.
- Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions. Physical bullying includes, but is not limited to, unwanted sexual physical contact, poking, pinching, scratching, or hitting.
- Cyber-bullying is any form of bullying or harassment carried by means of electronic media, including, but not limited to, the internet, social media, email, texting, sexting, instant messaging, cell phones, pagers any wireless communication device, bulletin boards, chat rooms, local or external networks, or any other form of electronically transmitted communication.

Bullying will not be tolerated, and students will be held accountable. Administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and students are asked to “pay attention, get involved, and never look away.”

Educational programs at The Girls’ School teach the students how to recognize, refuse, and report bullying. Emphasis is placed on the important role of the “courageous bystander” in breaking the bullying cycle and students are taught both how to help without getting hurt and the difference between tattling and reporting.

Parents and students at The Girls’ School are encouraged to report any episodes that may involve bullying to the Head of School. If a bullying episode has occurred, teachers, administrators and parents will work together with the person bullying, the person being bullied, and the students who observed the bullying to seek solutions.

### **Bullying Complaint and Response Procedures**

Complaints of bullying should promptly be brought to the attention of school administration or staff. Complaints of bullying will promptly be addressed in a sensitive and confidential manner, including complaints concerning off-site conduct at school sponsored events that have a detrimental and disruptive effect on the school environment. Complaints will be promptly investigated and responded to as appropriate under the circumstances and in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

Student Reporting of Bullying-Students who feel that they have been the victim of bullying or cyber-bullying should tell a teacher or school administrator about the bullying right away. Students should feel safe and secure at school and should feel free to talk to school staff about bullying.

Bullying Complaint and Response Procedures are as follows:

- a) Any student who feels that they have been the victim of bullying, cyber-bullying, or harassment should tell a teacher or school administrator (other than the person(s) whom they feel engaged in the bullying conduct) about the matter right away.
- b) All school representatives receiving a complaint of bullying shall consider whether the conduct in question constitutes child abuse or neglect, thereby triggering compliance with applicable child protection laws in the State of Texas. If the conduct in question is covered by Texas law, then all school representatives involved in the matter shall promptly comply with the reporting procedures required by the GSA and the Texas Department of Protective and Family Services (TDFPS).



- c) All investigations shall be performed in a confidential manner and in accordance with all applicable laws, including laws pertaining to privacy, consent, and search and seizure.
- d) All records concerning the investigation shall be kept confidential in a sealed investigation file and shall not be disclosed to any other party except the person to whom the results of the investigation are being reported, or as otherwise required or permitted by law.
- e) Reports to Law Enforcement Agencies: Matters involving bullying may need to be reported to outside law enforcement agencies. The Head of School will determine whether the matter should be referred to law enforcement and shall make such referral as appropriate.
- f) **Complaint Response:** Complaints of bullying or harassment that are not covered under Texas law shall be immediately investigated by and responded to by the Head of School or her designee as follows:
  - 1. The initial student complaints of bullying or harassment may be made verbally, to be followed up as soon as possible by a written complaint as necessary.
  - 2. The school representative receiving the complaint shall immediately verbally communicate the complaint to the Head of School or their designee in person or by telephone, followed up by a written report of the complaint to the Head of School or their designee within 24 hours of the complaint initially being made. The Head of School or designee shall conduct an informal, preliminary investigation of the complaint of bullying in a professional and discreet manner. The preliminary investigation shall be promptly completed after the complaint has been received (within 5 school days whenever possible). A written report of the investigation if conducted by someone other than the Head of School shall be provided to the Head of School.
  - 3. The Head of School shall independently make the determination as to whether to proceed further with investigation or if additional actions are necessary.
  - 4. If it is determined that further investigation or response is necessary, the Head of School shall conduct further investigation or response as may be necessary, which may include, but is not limited to, the following measures:
    - o Further interviews and gathering of evidence
    - o Conducting a conflict resolution session between the students involved in the matter
    - o Student discipline, up to and including detention, academic probation, suspension, or expulsion
    - o Conducting an Anti-Bullying/Harassment training at a student assembly or other appropriate forum
  - 5. Upon the conclusion of the follow-up investigation, the Head of School shall prepare a written report of the investigation that (1) details the

- investigation that was performed, (2) identifies witnesses interviewed and evidence gathered and reviewed, and (3) recommends further action, if any, to be taken and the basis therefor. Copies of evidence relied upon for the report and recommendations shall be attached as exhibits to the report.
6. The Head of School will make a final determination as to further actions taken. The investigation, report, and recommendations shall be handled in accordance with the Girls' School student discipline process as appropriate, including without limitation, rights of appeal.

### **Parent Involvement**

It is the Girls' School policy to involve parents in educating their children about bullying and to obtain parents' support and involvement in preventing bullying. The following are some measures parents can take to assist in preventing and responding to bullying:

- Talk with your child often and listen carefully to what they have to say, including if they are being bullied
- Discuss bullying behavior and how hurtful it can be to others
- Make behavioral expectations clear and be consistent with discipline when siblings and peers engage in hurtful teasing and bullying
- Help your child understand the meaning of friendship by modeling friendly behavior and showing how friends act positively toward each other
- Discuss the fact that people are individuals, and that everyone develops characteristics and personalities that make them who they are
- Model basic manners and respect for family, friends, and peers
- Encourage your child to tell an adult when they are being bullied
- Familiarize yourself with the school rules, expected behaviors, and consequences of bullying
- Participate at school, offer services, and attend school-sponsored activities
- Communicate regularly with your child's teacher
- Report bullying behavior immediately to the school when you become aware it is happening
- Seek assistance from the school when your child is involved in bullying, whether the child is a victim, a bystander, or is engaging in the bullying conduct
- Keep accurate records of bullying incidents and provide as specific information as possible to school staff when addressing bullying situations
- If your child has been the victim of bullying, build their confidence and independence with reassurances:

- o Tell your child that they are not at fault, and that it is the bully's behavior that is the problem
- o Tell your child that everyone is entitled to respect, and that they do not deserve to be bullied
- o Tell your child that you will work with the school staff to address the problem
- o Tell your child you will meet with their teacher or the Head of School

## APPENDIX B

# STUDENT LEAVE OF ABSENCE AND STUDENT RE-ENTRY POLICY

### **Medical Leave**

At the GSA, we know the health and well-being of our students is crucial. At times, maintaining a student's health – physical or mental – may necessitate partnership between the school, student, family, and health providers to ensure our students' needs are met safely. This may include a period of leave from the school or a period where the student has a decreased schedule to support treatment needs. Parents and guardians may initiate a student leave request by contacting the Head of School, School Counselor, or their child's grade level teacher or advisor(s). GSA faculty may also initiate this process if necessary. GSA expects that a medical or mental health professional will be involved in the process of granting Medical Leave to any student.

At GSA, the Student Support Team, which includes the Head of School, School Counselor, Director of DEIB/SEL, and Student Support Coordinator, will make decisions regarding any student who needs to be placed on Medical Leave, in consultation with the student's grade level teacher or advisor(s). If the student's needed level of care to ensure their safety is beyond what GSA can provide, leave can be granted. The intent of this leave policy is to ensure any student is able to access appropriate treatment while ensuring the student's ongoing membership in the learning community at the GSA. Documentation of that treatment is required to be placed on Medical Leave. Families are also highly encouraged to connect their child's treatment team with the School Counselor or Head of School.

The Student Support Team and the student's grade level teacher or advisor(s) will work together to make sure the student has academic assignments, as appropriate, so they are able to keep up with their work. The student is also encouraged to communicate directly with teachers if possible to keep up as they are able.

Should the period of Medical Leave become indeterminate, GSA will initiate a conversation about whether the school is still an appropriate academic placement for the student.

### **Personal Leave**

Parent(s) or guardian(s) may request Personal Leave for a student to separate from school for a specific period not to exceed one semester or two

trimesters within the same school year. Decisions regarding Personal Leave requests will be made by the Student Support Team in consultation with the student's grade-level teacher or advisor(s). Personal Leave requests may be related to extenuating family circumstances or other time-limited personal endeavors that require physical absence from campus.

### *Student Re-Entry*

For a student to return to campus after a period of Medical or Personal Leave, the Head of School and members of the Student Support Team will meet with the student as well as their parent(s) or guardian(s). The student and their parent(s) or guardian(s) will be provided with any requirements to return to school, which may include off-campus evaluation, documentation of completed treatment, or completion of previously agreed-upon academic material. The student will also meet with the School Counselor to create a Student Support Plan to assist them in transitioning back to campus.

There may be situations when it is not appropriate for a student who has been on leave to return to the community. Examples may include the school's ability to keep the student or others safe in the context of the student's attendance or the student's ability to keep up adequately with academic assignments and progress.

## APPENDIX C

### GSA EVENTS AND TRADITIONS GUIDE

#### SCHOOL SONG

(to the tune of *Yellow Submarine*)

In our school, the GSA  
We do math everyday  
We make art, and play our songs,  
Read and write a lot all day long.

Hablamos Español,  
Fun and learning are our goals.  
We do cool experiments,  
Then eat and play with our sis.

We all go to The GSA, The GSA, The GSA  
We all go to The GSA, The G-S-A!

#### **Annual Events**

Below is a list of annual GSA events. Please refer to “On The Horizon” emails and the GSA website for the most accurate and up to date information.

#### **Fall Celebration**

- When: Tentatively September 28, 2024
- Cost: approx. \$25/person

#### **Theme Parade**

- When: Friday, October 25, 2024
- Who: GSA Students
- What: Each year a new theme is selected. The theme for 2024 is “Adventure is Out There!”. Students create costumes based on that theme and participate in a theme parade followed by visiting activity stations with their sister groups. Homemade costumes are highly encouraged, especially of the recycled, low stress variety. Costumes should be appropriate for a K-8 audience.

#### **Grandparents’ Day**

- When: November 8, 2024
- Where: GSA Campus
- Who: Students and Grandparents/Grand-Friends
- What: Grandparents or “grand-friends” (an older friend or relative) are invited to spend some time on campus where they will see a class

performance featuring their granddaughter(s), participate in activities, visit classrooms, and enjoy refreshments.

- Cost: free

### **Book Fair at Book People**

- When: February 10-14, 2025
- Where: BookPeople (603 N. Lamar and online)
- Who: GSA families- optional
- What: This event is a partnership between GSA and local bookstore, BookPeople. A percentage of all merchandise sales from the designated week in the Winter will go towards GSA when you present the flier at checkout. The highlight of the week is a family night for GSA families at BookPeople featuring readings and refreshments. This week includes other celebrations of books and reading on campus such as guest readers and a presentation from an author.
- Cost: free

### **Talent Show**

- When: Tentative date - March 7, 2025
- Where: On Campus
- Who: GSA families and friends
- What: Students in Grades 3-8 perform for families at the annual talent show organized by the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade.
- Cost: free

### **GSA Spring Gala**

- When: April 6, 2025
- Where: The Mansion- 2312 San Gabriel St. Austin, Texas 78705
- Who: GSA Families, Faculty and Staff, Friends of GSA
- What: A fun filled fundraising gala featuring entertainment, auctions, and a seated dinner. Join the GSA community to celebrate our students and raise money for GSA.
- Cost: approx. \$300 per person

### **Self-Portrait Show**

- When: May 3-4, 2025
- Where: GSA Campus
- Who: GSA families, friends and neighbors, open to the public
- What: The GSA and larger Austin community is invited to drop in and visit a display of self-portraits from all our K-8 students. A reception with refreshments is prepared for attendees. Come and go as you please.
- Cost: free

### **Graduation**

- When: Thursday, May 22, 2025
- Where: GSA Campus
- Who: GSA students, faculty, and families – Open to all!
- What: Graduation program includes faculty speakers, student musicians, and a speech from each 8<sup>th</sup> grade student. Following the speeches, each grade participates in the ceremonial ‘ringing of the bells’ to signify their move up to the next grade.
- Cost: free

### **Ongoing Events**

Below is a list of GSA events that occur weekly or monthly throughout the school year.

### **Sister Groups**

Every GSA student is assigned to a multi-grade sister group and remains in that group for their time at the GSA. Sister group activities and lunches are held throughout the year, and they sit together at Friday community meetings.

### **Community Meetings**

- When: Friday mornings  
Where: MUB
- Who: GSA students, faculty and staff, GSA families  
What: These student-led gatherings are designed to bring the whole school together as a community. The student hosts may include important monthly celebrations (like Native American Heritage Month, and Black History Month, among others), school-wide announcements, a greeting, a sister group activity, class presentations, birthdays, and the singing of our school song. All GSA community members, including families, are invited to join this weekly tradition.