

George Mason Elementary School
Student/Parent Handbook
2025-2026



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Our School

School Hours

Doors open at 8:20AM

School starts at 8:30AM

Student dismissal begins at 3:05PM

For students who plan to have breakfast, breakfast is served in the cafeteria from 8:10-8:20AM.

Office Hours

Office hours are 7:45AM-4:00PM Monday through Friday.

Arrival

- **Bus Riders:** Buses arrive by 8:10am. Students will be greeted and escorted by GM staff to either the cafeteria for breakfast or, if they are not eating breakfast, to the gym until homerooms open at 8:20am.
- **Car Riders:**
 - Parents may drop off students in the car loop or park in the garage and escort their child to the main entrance. George Mason parents should not enter the car loop before 8:05am. Entering earlier will result in getting caught in Ferdinand T. Day's drop-off line. Parents who arrive before 8:05am may park in the garage. GM staff will unload students in the car loop from 8:20-8:28am. Students should not be dropped off before 8:20am as GM staff will not be available to supervise them. Students will enter the building at Door #2. We kindly request that goodbyes occur at the entrance and that you allow your child to enter the building independently. School staff will be at various stations to ensure students arrive to their classrooms. Parents must remain in their vehicle when using the car loop.
 - Instruction begins promptly at 8:30am, so please allow enough time for students to transition to class.
 - Students arriving after 8:30am will be marked tardy. Parents should park in the garage and walk the student to the main office for sign-in. Parking on the adjacent streets and bus loop, even if temporarily, is prohibited.

Dismissal

- Dismissal begins at 3:05pm.
- **Car Riders:** Parents may pick up their child by either remaining in their vehicle and using the car loop or by parking in the garage and walking to meet their child outside Door #4. George Mason parents should not enter the car loop before 2:55pm. Entering earlier will result in getting caught in Ferdinand T. Day's pick-up line. Parents who arrive before 2:55pm may park in the garage.
- If you are late picking up your child, we will bring your child to the office and the office staff will attempt to reach you. If we cannot reach you, we will call your emergency contacts. As the last resort, we will notify Child Services.

Transportation Changes and Play Dates

If your pick-up plans change, send a note addressed to the teacher the day of the change and the teacher will inform the office. If you have a change and are unable to send a note, we ask that you call the office no later than 11:00AM to make sure that your child gets the message. Please call the school for same-day dismissal changes (do not use e-mail).

It is best to arrange play dates in advance. If you are taking a child home with you whom you normally do not

pick up, a note from the child's parent needs to be sent to school.

Bus Transportation

Bus routes are sent home at the beginning of the school year. You also may call the ACPS Transportation office (703-461-4169) or the George Mason office. Kindergarten students will be given a sticker with a large "K" printed on it and they are seated in the front of the bus. Please keep this K sticker on your child's backpack throughout the school year. For Kindergarten students, an adult must pick up students from the bus stop each day. If an adult is not at the bus stop, the bus will bring the student back to school and the school will call you.

If your child has a problem on the bus, please contact the school as soon as possible. For safety reasons, there is a video camera on every school bus.

Attendance

Report an Absence

To report an absence, please call the main office at 703-706-4470 or e-mail GMAttendance@acps.k12.va.us. Please include the name of the student, the date of the absence, and the reason for his/her absence. If your child will miss school for a planned absence please notify the school registrar and teachers.

Please make every effort to schedule your family vacation around the school calendar. Please do not expect your child's teacher to provide you with a packet of work to take along; teachers will provide the work that is missed upon your child's return to school. School days missed due to vacation are considered unexcused absences. Please keep in mind that students in Grades 3-5 take state exams at the end of the school year. It is very important for all students to be present during this testing window. The school will post the testing dates once they have been determined.

Appointments

Please send a note to school with your child, notifying the teacher of the child's need to leave early. When you arrive at school, sign out your child in the main office. The office staff will ask the teacher to send your child to the office for dismissal.

Documentation for Medical Illness

The school must request that documentation from a physician be provided after your student has accrued 3 consecutive absences or 10 or more absences within a given school year.

Absence Notice

If you receive a call or note from the school social worker regarding your child's number of absences or tardies, please contact the school social worker by calling the office. The social worker will contact you initially when your child has 5 unexcused absences. If your student has 7-10 unexcused absences, an attendance conference will be held with administration, teachers, and support staff to create a formal attendance plan. If your student has 11 or more unexcused absences, the school is required to submit a referral to the ACPS truancy specialist. The goal is to partner with you to ensure that your child has good attendance, and to remove any barriers that may be present. Please view the social worker as a resource, and feel free to contact them at any time with questions or concerns.

Visiting During School Day

During the school day, we lock all entry doors for the safety and security of our students. Please ring the doorbell at the main entrance (Door #1) and the office staff will open the door once they have identified who you are and your purpose for visiting. We require all parents and visitors to enter through the main office and register on the computer. All adult visitors must wear a visitor sticker while in the building and then return to the office to sign out.

Lunch

George Mason parents and guardians are welcome to have lunch with their child(ren) during the last week of each month. Lunch weeks will be shared via the school newsletter in advance. We ask that you meet your child in the cafeteria. Younger siblings are welcome, too. If your child's classroom lunch table is full of students we ask that you and your child sit at an open table. A friend of your child is welcome to join you both. The cafeteria hostess can help direct you to an open table.

Parking

Visitor parking is available only in the adjacent parking garage in spaces marked for George Mason visitors on the 3rd floor. The garage is shared by George Mason, Ferdinand T. Day, and The Goddard School. The gate to the garage will be open between 7:40-8:45am and 2:00-6:30pm. If you are visiting outside of these hours, you will utilize the call box to gain access. Please note that the garage is actively monitored by ACPS security. Vehicles parked in spaces reserved for ACPS staff or visitors to other schools may be subject to towing. Parking on adjacent side streets is strictly prohibited at all times, as they are designated fire lanes. Parking in the spaces across the street from Ferdinand T. Day is prohibited as it is private parking for the community across the street. Parking in the bus loop is not allowed under any circumstances. These policies are strictly enforced by ACPS Security.

Student Birthdays

Please do not send anything to school on your child's birthday. The ACPS Wellness Policy prohibits families from bringing in food to classrooms.

Discipline and Resolving Conflicts

George Mason uses Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies to create a positive climate. The three school expectations are:

1. Be Safe
2. Be Respectful
3. Be Responsible

If your child is having an issue in school, always talk with your child's teacher first. If your child is having trouble with a staff member, please talk with the staff member directly. If you are unable to reach a satisfactory resolution, please contact the principal or assistant principal.

Lost and Found

The lost and found is located in the cafeteria. Parents are asked to label backpacks, lunch boxes, jackets, and clothing to facilitate the timely return of these items to students. Any items left unclaimed in the lost and found will be discarded or donated at the end of each quarter.

Personal Mobile Devices and Smart Watches

Personal mobile devices (cell phones) must be silenced (or turned off) and put away during the school day. Personal mobile devices can be stored in a school-identified secure location. Smart watches are prohibited as well and must be put away during the school day. Students are prohibited from using cell phones, tablets, and mobile devices, including ACPS issued devices, in restrooms and locker rooms in an effort to protect the privacy rights of others.

Communications

School Communications

The primary means of communication between the school and families is ParentSquare. Both school staff and parents may use the message feature to communicate through ParentSquare. ParentSquare features a translation feature as well. The school newsletter, The Mason Messenger, is sent via ParentSquare on an as-needed basis. The principal also sends announcements/reminders via ParentSquare when critical information needs to be shared. The school uses a text messaging program to send texts about time sensitive matters or reminders. Families can learn more about ParentSquare, access the link to download the application, and learn how to activate their account on the follow ACPS web page:

<https://www.acps.k12.va.us/departments/school-community-relations/community-partnerships-and-engagement/school-engagement-community-outreach/parentsquare>

Social Media Accounts

- Principal X page: <https://x.com/GMasonPrincipal>
- GM Facebook page: [facebook.com/GeorgeMasonElementarySchool](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgeMasonElementarySchool)
- GM Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/georgemasonelementaryschool>
- GM X page: <https://x.com/GeorgeMasonES>
- GM PTA Facebook page: [facebook.com/GeorgeMasonPTA](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgeMasonPTA)
- GM PTA Instagram page: <https://www.instagram.com/georgemasonpta>

Thursday Folders

The Thursday Folder is a weekly “school-to-home-to-school” communication tool that will come home in your child’s backpack every Thursday. It will contain important school communications, information from your child’s teacher, and notifications about school events. You can use the Thursday Folder to return forms or send notes to your child’s teacher(s).

Teacher Communications

Teachers share communication about classroom learning and activities through ParentSquare. Teachers also send direct messages to parents using ParentSquare. Parents should primarily contact teachers through the messaging feature on ParentSquare or via e-mail. Teachers are typically not available during school hours to receive phone calls. However, if you need to contact a teacher via phone, the main office can assist you by taking a message.

If you have communications or forms to return to school on another day, ask your child to give any item to his/her teacher first thing in the morning. The teacher will ensure that the item gets to the correct destination. You can also drop off school forms in the main office.

PTA Communications

The PTA sends out a weekly newsletter on ParentSquare to parents who subscribe to it. It lists important dates and includes details on upcoming events. There is also information on the PTA website, <http://www.georgemasonpta.org/>.

Reaching Your Child During the Day

Classrooms will not be interrupted during the instructional day except in an emergency situation. If you must contact your child or teacher during school hours, please call the main office at (703)706-4470.

School Directory

A School Directory is created and distributed in the fall. The School Directory lists student and family contact information and parent email addresses (for those who opt to share this information). The directory also includes the George Mason Staff Information roster and PTA Committee contacts. One copy will be sent home with the youngest child in each family, courtesy of the George Mason PTA.

Communication with other Families

Please do not send items into school for distribution to other children (such as party invitations). ACPS prohibits schools from sending home items in student backpacks that are not school-related or Alexandria City-approved documents. You may use the School Directory to find the necessary family information you might need.

Change in contact information

Parents are asked to notify the office as soon as possible after moving and changing their home or email address, home telephone and/or work telephone number(s). It is very important that school staff have up-to-date information in order to contact parents about their child's progress or in case of an emergency.

ACPS Communications

You can subscribe to ACPS Express e-newsletter at <http://www.acpsk12.org/news> for the latest news about our schools and happenings throughout ACPS.

Photography

School Pictures and Yearbook

Formal pictures of each child and class are taken on a designated day in the fall. Parents have the option to purchase picture packages of their child and a class picture, but it is not required.

At the end of the school year each child receives a yearbook for free (thanks to the PTA and advertisements from local businesses and GM families). The yearbook includes photos of each student, formal and informal class pictures, and pictures from school events.

Pictures of your child

Throughout the school year there are events and activities during which your child may be photographed and images may be shared to promote George Mason Elementary School or ACPS. If you do not want your child photographed during the school day or their images shared, you may opt out when completing the Back to School Forms online at the start of the school year.

Emergency Guidelines

Emergency Announcements

School closing announcements, due to inclement weather, are publicized in the following ways:

- ParentSquare
- ACPS Website (www.acps.k12.va.us)
- ACPS Social Media: [Twitter](#) (@ACPSk12) and [Facebook](#) (facebook.com/ACPSk12)
- Alexandria City's eNews alert messages (www.alexandriava.gov)
- ACPS Hotline: 703-866-5300
- ACPS-TV, Channel 71 in the City of Alexandria
- Local television and radio stations

In the case of other emergencies, information will be announced as early as possible.

During a School Emergency

Staff and students are prepared for emergency situations. George Mason participates in emergency drills throughout the year, and staff and emergency responders know the best procedures for keeping students safe.

More information on school emergencies including terms and what to do after an emergency can be found on the ACPS website at <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/emergency>.

Academics

Curriculum

George Mason's academic program includes reading, writing, mathematics, social studies, and science with an infusion of technology. The school also offers Art, Music/Band/Orchestra, PE (Physical Education) and Library, which are referred to as Encore Classes. Each Encore class meets once a week with the exception of PE, which meets twice a week. George Mason supports social emotional learning as well with a morning meeting and activities embedded into content classes throughout the day. Each class has thirty minutes of recess and thirty minutes for lunch each day.

In addition, the school offers

- Advanced Academic Services (AAS) for children who demonstrate high levels of accomplishment or who show the potential for higher levels of accomplishment when compared to others of the same age, experience, or environment.
- Special Education Services
- English Language (EL) Services
- Family Life education at levels appropriate to age

Encore classes

- Library - Children can check out one or two books at a time, depending on their grade level. If your child loses a library book, they lose the privilege to check out books until the lost book has been found or paid for. Books may be sent back to school at any time; it is not necessary to wait until library day.
- PE – Children should wear closed-toe athletic shoes on the days they have PE.
- General Music– Grades K-3 will receive general music instruction
- Instrumental Music – Grades 4-5 are given the opportunity to play an instrument in band or orchestra. Our instrumental music teachers will meet with all third graders at the end of the year to introduce them to the instruments available starting in 4th grade.

Advanced Academic Services (AAS)

AAS plan as well as other information on AAS will be found at <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/programs-services/advanced-academic-services>. Any parent, staff member or community member may refer a child for AAS. Information about the referral process, including deadlines, is available on the AAS website. Students in K through 3rd grade can be referred for General Intellectual Aptitude (GIA) AAS. Students in grades 4-5 can be referred for Subject Specific AAS services. Parent/guardian permission is required before testing can occur.

Academic/Social/Emotional Student Concerns

If you have any concerns about your child, please talk to your child's teacher first. The teacher will direct you to the appropriate staff member who can best assist you with addressing your needs.

Out-of-Class Instructional Assignments Policy

Our teachers follow the ACPS guidelines for out-of-class instructional assignments. There is a recommended daily average of no more than 10 minutes per grade level beginning with 1st Grade, for example 10 minutes for 1st grade or 30 minutes for 3rd grade. In addition, there is a minimum daily out of class reading practice recommendation ranging from 15 minutes for Kindergarten to 20 minutes for all other grades (Read to self or be read to for K-2).

Please note that these are only guidelines - some students may have more or less out of class assignments depending on their teacher(s) and the projects their class is working on.

For more detailed information about ACPS Guidelines for Instructional Assignments go to <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/school-board/school-board-policies> and look at the links for IKD and IKD-R.

Services

Meals

Information about meals, pricing, menus and nutrition are available on the ACPS Website at <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/departments/facilities-operations/the-office-of-school-nutrition-services>.

Setting up an Account

Although your child is welcome to bring in cash to purchase an occasional school meal, it is strongly preferred that you set up a meal account for your child, especially if they are going to be making regular purchases.

There are three ways to set up an account for your child:

- Create an online account at <https://www.schoolcafe.com/alexandriacps> using your child(ren)'s Student ID.
- Send a check (made payable to George Mason School Nutrition) or cash in with your child in an envelope that can be taken to the cafeteria.
- Bring a check or cash into the office and the office staff will take the money to the cafeteria manager to place on your child's account. Please note that the cafeteria staff work early hours and are not available after 1pm.

Special Request

If you want to make special requests for what your child can buy at the cafeteria (e.g., Milk Only, Ice Cream once a month, etc.), please contact our front office.

Free and Reduced Price Meals

ACPS students may receive free and reduced price meals if family income meets eligibility requirements. Application forms are sent to all students' homes, and are available in the school's main office. You may also apply online. For more information go to <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/departments/facilities-operations/the-office-of-school-nutrition-services/free-and-reduced-price-meals>.

Parents who believe their children may be eligible for free or reduced price meals should complete the forms and return them to their children's schools. Foster children may also be eligible for these benefits. This information is kept strictly confidential and only authorized staff are allowed access to this information. Your child would use the pin number as do other students in the lunch line.

Health Services

Illness

If your child is sick, please call the school to let us know that your child is going to be absent. If a doctor has seen your child, a note from the doctor is preferred. Students with fever, diarrhea, & vomiting must stay home (and be free of symptoms for 24 hours). Students with other symptoms should stay home if they are unable to participate in learning. Please contact the school nurse with any questions (703-706-4470).

Medication

If your child needs medicine, bring the medication to the school's nurse, along with one of the following forms. For over-the-counter medicine, a Parent Authorization form must be signed. This allows the school to give medication for three consecutive days. Otherwise, a doctor needs to fill out the Medication Authorization form. Please see our School Nurse for a form copy. Please contact the nurse regarding any and all health-related issues

with your child. Students are not permitted to transport any type of medication to/from school, this includes over-the-counter medication.

Food Allergies

ACPS is committed to keeping students safe and healthy at school. As part of that commitment, we have revised our food allergy guidelines to conform to best practice standards. The updated food allergy guidelines comply with recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Association of School Nurses. **Best practice guidance has moved ACPS from an allergen-free to allergy-aware school system. All students will sit with the general student population during lunch.**

The new ACPS Managing Food Allergies in Schools program focuses on three areas: safeguarding the environment, planning for allergy emergencies and providing education and training. **Please see the school nurse with questions or if your child has a food allergy.**

Hazel Health

Hazel Health is a service supported by ACPS in which students can meet with a licensed therapist virtually for therapy appointments. Services are available at school and at home, and are at no cost to families. Therapy referrals can be completed by families or by school-based staff. For more information, please contact a member of the GM student support team.

Mason Market

The Mason Market is an on-site food pantry that is accessible to all families and members of the George Mason Community. Visitors can pick up non-perishable food items, as well as hygiene supplies, as available. Hours for the Mason Market are shared through school communications at the beginning of the year.

Other Student Support Services

If your family is in need of clothing or other necessities, please contact the school social worker.

Activities

During School

Special programs, events, and performances are held throughout the school year to provide enrichment opportunities for all students. Information about these activities are shared through regular announcements from the school.

After School

After School Care

The Campagna Center runs an after-school program in the cafeteria. Fees are based on a sliding scale. For more information, go to www.campagnacenter.org or call 703-549-0111.

After School Clubs

After School Clubs are offered after school through the PTA and Baroody Camps. There are a variety of activities such as chess, dance, tennis, art, and more. Club sessions take place in the fall, winter, and spring. Information on after school clubs becomes available at the start of the school year.

Community Partnership

George Mason works closely with Community Lodgings, a non-profit organization that provides tutoring and enrichment.

Other Extracurricular Events

Throughout the school year the PTA sponsors other special events for our community to enjoy. These events are optional but offer enrichment opportunities outside of the school day. Examples of these events are the Ice Cream Social on the playground in September and DragonFest in the Spring. Event dates are shared via PTA and school newsletters throughout the year.

Get Involved

Some parents volunteer in their own child(ren)'s classroom and others volunteer with other teachers and/or in other parts of the school as tutors, etc. Teachers will talk with you at Back to School Night about ways in which you can volunteer in their classrooms. If you have a special talent or interest that you would like to share, please talk with the principal.

Volunteer Registration

All volunteers must be registered and approved prior to volunteering at George Mason, including as a field trip chaperone. This is a simple process but does require completing and submitting a volunteer application. A background check will be performed on all applicants, so please allow 1-2 weeks for your application to be processed. This process is free of charge. Please visit <https://www.acps.k12.va.us/families/volunteer> for more information.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

George Mason has a very active and involved PTA and is always in need of individuals who have time and talents to donate. This doesn't have to be during the school day. Please contact the PTA at georgemasonpta@gmail.com if you would like to volunteer.