

Great Expectations School Employee Handbook

August, 2014

Section 1: Introductory Statement

The operation of Great Expectations School (GES) exists amidst a blending of two strong frameworks: Minnesota charter school law and the GES mission. Charter school law provides exemption from certain requirements and mandates others in order to establish educator-led public schools that deliver innovative programs to produce improved student performance. The founders of GES developed a mission statement for an effective charter school based on a broad and unique vision that redefines what that improved student performance might entail:

The mission of the school is to develop in each child:

- **a love of learning;**
- **critical and creative thinking skills;**
- **mastery of the academic building blocks;**
- **the ability to nurture family, friends, and self;**
- **a strong commitment to being a contributing member of a community;**
- **open-heartedness toward others;**
- **and a passion for life-long learning.**

This mission leads us to an educational philosophy wherein teaching and student interactions are based on the following premises:

- that all children want to be good and to succeed,
- that optimal learning occurs when children feel safe and cared for, are given clear expectations, and experience a sense of belonging, and
- that children's academic and social growth are equally important; occurring in harmony with each other, not in isolation.

Working at GES means we get the opportunity to help create the school's culture and educational environment. It also means we have the corresponding responsibilities. It means we have the benefits of flexibility, independence, and creativity; and also the obligations of engagement, collaboration, and accountability. In all things, however, we remain focused on our mission's call for individual student success.

Understanding this unique situation, the board has developed this resource in order to clarify expectations for how we will work together successfully. It is not meant to be the definitive document on all these issues – that's what policies are for – but should provide a good overview of important areas of concern. If you have any questions, you are invited to ask the school Director or a representative of the GES school board for additional information. We hope you will find working at GES incredibly satisfying.

Section 2: Guiding Principles

It is our belief that principles, rather than rules, should be the ultimate guides in creating a culture of professionalism. While rules are often useful to add clarity, they cannot provide the flexibility or discretion necessary to ensure the outcomes they were created to support. Consequently, when circumstances are such that the guidelines presented in this document yield an unintended result, the school Director and/or the GES school board will look to the guiding principles in deciding how to deal with an issue.

Great Expectations School is committed to the principles of Responsive Classroom, one of which is "***How [we] work together is as important as [our] individual competence: lasting change begins with the adult community.***"

Living out this principle involves exhibiting the C.A.R.E.S. behaviors – **C**ooperation, **A**ssertion, **R**esponsibility, **E**mpathy, and **S**elf-control – in all we say and do. In our professional practice, this might manifest itself as follows:

Cooperation:

- Collaboration: sharing curriculum ideas; co-creating and co-teaching units
- Sharing: teaching colleagues in a specific area of expertise, formally or informally, either from prior experience or from specific training.
- Collegiality: remaining accessible to colleagues and respectful of their positions
- Impartiality: acknowledging all colleagues as important community members
- Compromise: seeking mutually beneficial resolutions to conflicts or obstacles

Assertion:

- Participation: engaging fully in staff meetings and other decision-making venues
- Clarity: making your goals, interests, and intentions known and understood
- Directness: communicating directly with the relevant parties
- Timeliness: addressing issues promptly
- Persistence: maintaining respectful dialogue until a resolution is determined
- Escalation: working to keep issues moving forward when an impasse is reached

Responsibility:

- Professionalism: maintaining a standard of behavior and appearance, in both the school and the broader community, that reflects honor and integrity consistent with our collective goals and the school's mission
- Confidentiality: sharing student and family information only in an appropriate setting; only with appropriate staff members, and only to benefit the student, to support the teacher in resolving a problem or getting feedback, or to communicate an issue that impacts the broader school community.
- Consistency: words and actions always reflect an attitude of care toward students, families, colleagues, resources, and facilities.

- Dependability: displaying follow through with commitments and obligations (e.g. daily routines, facility/resource maintenance, meeting preparedness, administrative procedures, progress reports, scheduled events, etc.)
- Development: actively seeking opportunities to improve professional knowledge and skills, including attendance at school- and community-sponsored development events

Empathy:

- Promptness: being on time with schedules, deadlines, and appointments
- Compassion: displaying sympathy for others' struggles and extending oneself to help
- Tolerance: embracing personal and professional differences as opportunities for expanding diversity with our community and enriching students' school experience
- Forgiveness: working to restore damaged relationships in a positive, hopeful manner

Self-control:

- Intentionality: ensuring that behavior – words, actions, and bearing – express a purpose and process consistent with our professional and institutional standards
- Humility: placing the needs of the students and school ahead of personal benefit
- Optimism: speaking and acting in ways that encourage others and promote progress
- Forbearance: providing others the benefit of the doubt in our judgment and responses
- Stewardship: using facilities and resources efficiently and with care
- Mindfulness: maintaining an awareness of how one's words, actions, and bearing may be perceived by others

Section 3: General Conditions

Right to Revise

This Employee Handbook summarizes the employment policies and practices of GES in effect at the time of publication. All previously issued handbooks or memoranda are superseded. GES reserves the right to revise, modify, delete, or add to any and all policies, procedures, work rules, or benefits stated in this handbook or in any other document. Any written changes to this handbook will be distributed to all employees so that employees will be aware of the new policies or procedures. No oral statements or representations can in any way alter the provisions of this handbook.

At-will Employment Status

Great Expectations School personnel are employed on an at-will basis. Employment at-will means the employment relationship may be terminated with or without cause and with or without advance notice at any time by the employee or the school. Nothing in this handbook shall limit the right to terminate at-will employment. No employee of the school has any authority to enter into an agreement for employment for any specified period of time or to make an agreement for employment on other than at-will terms. Only the Board of Directors of Great Expectations School has the authority to make any such agreement, which is binding only if it is in writing.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Great Expectations School is an equal opportunity employer and makes employment decisions on the basis of merit. We want to have the best available person in every job.

GES policy prohibits unlawful discrimination and is committed to compliance with all applicable laws providing equal employment opportunities. This commitment applies to **all** persons involved in the operations of GES and, consequently, prohibits unlawful discrimination by any school employee.

To comply with applicable laws ensuring equal employment opportunities to qualified individuals with a disability, GES will make reasonable accommodations for the known physical or mental limitations of an otherwise qualified individual with a disability who is an applicant or an employee unless undue hardship would result.

Any applicant or employee who requires an accommodation in order to perform the essential functions of the job should contact the school Director and request such an accommodation. The individual with the disability should specify what accommodation he or she needs to perform the job. GES will then conduct an investigation to identify the barriers that interfere with the equal opportunity of the applicant or employee to perform his or his job. GES will identify possible accommodations, if any, which will help eliminate the limitation. If the accommodation is reasonable and will not impose an undue hardship, GES will make the accommodation.

If you believe you have been subjected to any form of unlawful discrimination, submit a written complaint to the school Director. Your complaint should be specific and should include the names of the individuals involved and the names of any witnesses. If you need assistance with your complaint, or if the complaint involves the school Director, contact the GES school board Chair. GES will promptly undertake an effective, thorough and objective investigation and attempt to resolve the situation. If GES determines that unlawful discrimination has occurred, effective remedial action will be taken commensurate with the severity of the offense. Appropriate action also will be taken to deter any future discrimination. GES will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint and will not knowingly permit retaliation by management employees or your co-workers.

Personnel Records

GES is required by law to keep current all employees' names and addresses. Employees are responsible for notifying the Office Administrator in the event of a change in name, address, or contact information.

You have a right to inspect certain documents in your personnel file, as provided by law and in the presence of a school representative at a mutually convenient time. You may make no copies of documents in your file unless they have been previously signed by you. You may add your comments to any disputed item in the file. Requests to view your personnel file must be made to the school Director.

Only the school Director or his designee is authorized to release information about current or former employees. GES will release information in your personnel file only to authorized employees with a "need to know". Disclosure of personnel information to agencies or individuals outside the school will be limited; however, GES will cooperate with requests from authorized law enforcement or local, state or federal agencies conducting official investigations or as otherwise legally required.

Employee References

All requests for references must be directed to the school Director or his designee. No other employee is authorized to release references for current or former employees. GES will disclose only the dates of employment and the title of the last position held of former employees. If you authorize the disclosure in writing, GES also will inform prospective employers or lending institutions of the amount of salary or wage you last earned.

Disciplinary Action

GES expects all employees to comply with School rules, policies, and regulations. Any employee who fails to do so will be subject to disciplinary action that the school, in its sole discretion, deems appropriate under the circumstances. Such disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to, oral and written warnings, mandatory training, or termination of employment. Any employee's receipt of, participation in or completion of school-required disciplinary action shall not, under any circumstances, limit or alter the school's at-will employment policy.

The School has the right to remove any employee from any School facility or from the presence of any student or other School employees if the School fears for the safety of the employee, or the safety of student(s), visitors, or other employees.

Involuntary Termination

Violation of the law or of school policies or rules may warrant disciplinary action that results in termination. In addition, changes to enrollment, financial, or governance conditions may cause the board to revise the school's staffing and create involuntary terminations. None of the aforesaid shall affect the at-will status of employment at GES.

Voluntary Termination

Voluntary termination results when an employee voluntarily resigns his or her employment. Also, an employee who fails to report to work for three consecutively scheduled workdays without notice to and approval by the school Director shall be considered to have "abandoned" the job and voluntarily ended their employment.

Return of School Property

All GES-owned property, including keys, credit cards, student files, or school property kept offsite must be returned to the school immediately upon termination of employment.

Section 4: Wages & Benefits

Employee Classifications

Regular employees are those who are hired to work on a regular schedule. Regular employees may be classified as full-time or part-time. Full-time employees are those who are scheduled for 32 or more hours per week during the school year. Part-time employees are those scheduled for less than 32 hours per week during the school year.

Employees will also be classified as exempt or non-exempt. This classification is made as directed by State and Federal wage law. Non-Exempt employees will be paid overtime for working over 40 hours in a work week (Sunday - Saturday), and include the Office Administrator, Paraprofessional, and Teaching Assistant positions. Exempt employees are

classified under “administrative” or “professional” exemptions as defined by law, and include the Director, Business Manager, and Educator positions. Exempt employees may earn no overtime. However, additional pay may be earned for fulfilling additional school duties as assigned.

Work Schedules

GES site business hours are between 7:30 AM and 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday. The Director or designee will assign employee’s individual work schedule to ensure staffing throughout the workday. All employees are expected to be at their workstations at the start of their scheduled shifts, ready to work. Any employee unable to work a scheduled shift must provide advance notice to the school Director or designee. The school Director or designee has the right to require that employees work hours different than their regular schedule.

Overtime for Non-exempt Employees

Non-exempt employees may be directed to work overtime as necessary. Only actual hours worked in a given workday or workweek can apply in calculating overtime. All overtime work must be authorized by the school Director or designee prior to the time being worked. GES provides compensation for all overtime hours worked by non-exempt employees in accordance with state and federal law as follows:

All hours worked in excess of 40 hours in one work week will be treated as overtime.

Work weeks begin each Sunday at 12:01 a.m. Compensation for overtime hours shall be paid at a rate one-and-one-half times the employee's regular rate of pay.

Pay for Mandatory Meetings/Training

Non-exempt employees will receive additional pay for meeting/event attendance under the following conditions: their attendance at an event is mandatory; the event is directly related to the employee's job; and the event is held outside of their regular schedule. The employee who is required to attend such events will be notified in advance by the school Director or designee. Exempt employees will not receive additional compensation for their attendance.

Meal and Rest Periods

Regular full-time employees are provided with a 30-minute meal period, to be taken approximately in the middle of the workday, and a 10-minute rest period for every four hours of work or major portion thereof. The school Director or designee will schedule meal periods. Employees are expected to observe assigned working hours and meal periods. Employees may leave the premises during breaks.

Time Keeping

All non-exempt employees are required to use a timesheet to record time worked for payroll purposes. Employees must record their own time at the end of each day, and must submit their timesheets to the school Director or designee at the end of each pay period (the 9th and 24th of each month).

Payment of Wages

GES employees are paid twice per month. Payments will be made on the 15th and on the last bank day of the month. If you observe an error on your check, please report it to the school Business Manager or school Director immediately.

Direct Deposit

GES offers direct payroll deposit for employees at the employee's banking facility. You may begin and stop direct payroll deposit at any time. To begin or end direct payroll deposit, please contact the school Business Manager or school Director. Please note, it may take up to two pay periods before direct payroll deposit is activated.

Insurance:

Health care insurance coverage is available to full-time employees. GES will pay 90% of the cost of basic coverage for the employee for either of the two plans currently offered. Coverage for family members or additional services (e.g. dental) is available at the employee's expense. As allowed by the health plans, eligible employees may begin, cease, or modify their enrollment throughout the year by completing a change form which can be obtained from the school Director or Business Manager. Otherwise, all elections need to be made within 30 days of the annual plan cycle (currently September – August). Employees eligible for insurance coverage who decline enrollment, the school will provide a benefit of \$1,000 in additional compensation, payable over the course of the school year.

Paid Time Off (Personal Days and Sick Days): All employees are expected to work each of their scheduled shifts. However, personal circumstances may arise that need to be addressed and prevent an employee from attending work. Paid Time Off is intended to reduce the financial impact of these situations. Personal Days may be used in such circumstances at the employee's discretion. Sick Days may be used to care either for yourself or for family members who are ill (including pre-arranged appointments). Regular employees are eligible for paid time off to deal with unforeseen absences as follows: 1 Personal Day and 4 Sick Days per school year for full-time employees and 1 Personal Day and 1 Sick Day per school year for part-time employees. Paid Time Off may be used in half-day increments, but may not be banked from year to year and unused days will not be paid.

Retirement Assistance

All regular employees are eligible for Teacher's Retirement Association (TRA) or Public Employee's Retirement Association (PERA) contributions. For either plan, the employee contributes a portion of their gross pay and GES contributes a corresponding payment into a retirement account for the employee at rates determined by the State of Minnesota (currently at 6.25% and 7.25%, respectively, for PERA and both at 6% for TRA). Additional information about these plans can be obtained from the school Director or from the plan websites.

GES also offers all regular employees an opportunity to participate in a Deferred Compensation program provided by the state of Minnesota. This is a purely voluntary and solely employee-funded program that allows employees to make contributions to a retirement account on a pre-tax basis. Additional information about this plan can be obtained from the school Director or from the plan website

Workers' Compensation

GES, in accordance with state law, provides insurance coverage for employees in case of work-related injury. If you have received a work-related injury, please contact the school Director as soon as possible.

Section 5: A Culture of Professionalism

While most of the issues of professionalism can be addressed through our Guiding Principles (see Section 2), the following is intended to provide additional clarity or emphasis to specific areas.

Unlawful Harassment

Great Expectations School is committed to providing a work environment free of unlawful harassment. GES' s anti-harassment policy applies to all persons involved in the operation of GES and prohibits unlawful harassment by any school employee .

If you believe that you have been unlawfully harassed, submit a written complaint to the school Director as soon as possible. Your complaint should be specific and should include the names of the individuals involved and the names of any witnesses. If you need assistance with your complaint, or if the complaint involves the school Director, contact the GES school board Chair. GES will promptly undertake an effective, thorough and objective investigation and attempt to resolve the situation. A school representative will advise all parties concerned of the results of the investigation. If GES determines that unlawful harassment has occurred, effective remedial action will be taken commensurate with the severity of the offense. Any employee determined by GES to be responsible for unlawful harassment will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Appropriate action also will be taken to deter any future harassment. GES will not retaliate against you for filing a complaint and will not knowingly permit retaliation by management employees or your co-workers.

Professional Growth

It is the policy of Great Expectations School to assist employees in maintaining professional competence and growth. Opportunities for formal and informal training will be offered throughout the year, many of which will fill requirements for continuing professional education. GES does believe, however, that maintenance of professional licensure and certification is primarily the responsibility of the employee and does not assume an obligation to provide resources for this purpose.

Employee Evaluation

All employees will participate in an annual performance review process. The purpose of the review is to provide information on employee performance and behavior in order to reinforce strengths, identify areas for improvement, and develop plans for future development. As part of the process, employees are provided an opportunity to provide feedback and are required to sign their evaluation to acknowledge that it has been presented and discussed.

Gifts to Employees

It is the policy of Great Expectations School that no employee may accept any gift from an outside party, client, contractor, vendor, business associate, parent or student that is of such nature that it could affect his/her impartiality with regard to

decisions or action affecting their role or GES operations. Gifts with a value of \$50 or less are excluded from this policy.

Personal Conflicts of Interest

All employees must avoid situations involving actual or potential conflict of interest. Business or romantic involvement with a school supplier or an employee of the school may create such a conflict of interest. It is the responsibility of the employees involved in the relationship to disclose and discuss all relevant circumstances with the school Director for review and resolution. Failure to disclose such circumstances may cause the school to impose disciplinary action.

Employer Property & Systems

Computers, educational materials, equipment, and furniture are school property. School property is to be used only for work-related purposes. GES reserves the right to inspect all school property to ensure compliance with its rules and regulations, without notice to the employee and at any time, and not necessarily in the employee's presence.

The school may periodically need to assign and/or change passwords and personal codes for voice mail, e-mail, or computer use. Except as provided herein, these computer and communication systems are to be used only for school business and they remain the property of the school. GES reserves the right to keep a record of all passwords and codes used and to override any such password at any time at its sole discretion.

Employees may make or accept occasional, short personal telephone calls during working hours to perform personal business. It is also acceptable to use a computer to perform the same minimal personal tasks.

Prior authorization must be obtained from the Director or his designee before any school property may be removed from the premises, except in the course of normal movement of educational resources by employees.

Use of Electronic Media

The School uses various forms of electronic systems and communication including, but not limited to, computers, e-mail, telephones, and web sites. All electronic communications, including all software, databases, hardware, and digital files, remain the sole property of the school and are to be used only for school business and not for any personal use, except as allowed above.

Electronic communication and media may not be used in any manner that would be discriminatory, harassing or obscene, or for any other purpose that is illegal, against school policy, or not in the best interest of the school.

Employees may not download or install software on school computer systems without authorization of the school Director or his designee.

All electronic information created by any employee using any means of electronic communication is the property of the school and remains the property of the school.

The School reserves the right to access and review electronic files, messages, mail, and other digital archives, and to monitor the use of electronic communications as necessary to ensure that no misuse or violation of school policy or any law occurs.

Employees are not permitted to access the electronic communications of other employees or third parties unless directed to do so by the Director or his designee.

Any information about the school that will appear in the electronic media must be approved by the school Director or his designee before the information is placed on a public electronic information resource.

Questions about access to electronic communications or issues relating to security should be addressed to the school Director or his designee.

Grievance Process

We expect that employees will be able to work issues out directly with one another, or in collaboration with their peers. However, we also recognize that not everything will go as we intend. Any employee may raise an issue to the school Director for review and resolution. If the issue is with the Director, or needs to be escalated because the issue is not resolved, the issue may be referred to the Chair of the GES school board.