



# **GATE** **ACADEMY**

**PARENT HANDBOOK**  
**2023-2024**

# Welcome to GATE Academy!

We are a vibrant community deeply committed to the well-being of our children and the school. This handbook serves to clarify our school's policies, procedures, and practices. By choosing GATE Academy, you consent to adhere to these policies, and those set forward by the teaching faculty and administrative staff.

Good communications and a healthy school atmosphere depend on parents directing their questions and comments to the right person at GATE. Following the right channels means matters can be addressed promptly and effectively. Please bring your questions, comments, compliments, or concerns to those who can best help you. Here's who to talk to about what:

## **My Question is About:**

## **My Contact is:**

My child	My child's core teacher
My child's teacher	Dean of Curriculum or Head of School (HOS)
My child's individual assignments	Core teacher
My child's overall class assignments	Core teacher or Dean of Curriculum
My child's math assignments	Mathematics teacher
Another GATE student	My child's core teacher or Dean of Students
My tuition or fees	Billing and Finance
Re-enrollment	HOS
Dean of Faculty or Dean of Students	HOS
Head of School	Secretary, Board of Trustees
School Finances	COO

# GATE Academy Directory

Mailing Address: 1 Saint Vincents Drive, Building 1b, San Rafael, California 94903

Website: [www.GATEAcademy.org](http://www.GATEAcademy.org)

Office Phone: 415-491-4700

Office Fax: 415-491-4701

## Administration

### **Nichole Bond**

Head of School

415-491-4700

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### **Victoria Talkington**

Board Chair

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### **Sandy Jacklin**

Administration and Operations

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### **Sara Dawson**

Chief Operations Officer/Billing and Finance

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## Faculty

### **Adams, Julia Amber**

Expressive Movement Teacher

### **Huang, Kristen**

Upper School Teacher

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### **McHany, Katia**

Drama Teacher

### **Alexander, Chris**

Critical Writing Specialist

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### **Johnson, Roland (Coach)**

Dean of Students

Physical Education Teacher

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### **Schlotz, Bee**

Lower School Teacher

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### **Bond, Nichole**

Head of School,

Dean of Faculty

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### **Kiles, Tracy**

Upper School Teacher

Dean of Curriculum

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### **Knox, Theo**

Lower School Teacher

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### **Venkataramani, Sita**

Math Teacher

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### **Brahmandam, Pranathi**

Upper School Teacher

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### **Madole, Dawn**

Music Teacher

Violin Teacher

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### **Gerhard, Mark**

Art Teacher

## ***GATE Academy is the Marin School for Gifted Education***

Our mission is to cluster cognitively gifted students in small groups with their intellectual peers, and to provide an inquiry-based, accelerated, self-paced curriculum, in a school environment that emphasizes respect for self and others. We accomplish this by our skills based, individually student-focused, respect-based, secular, non-ideological and apolitical education.

### **Educational Philosophy**

Learning occurs in an atmosphere of positive expectations, shared respect, open-minded listening and investigation, and mutual effort between students and teachers. We encourage our students to rely on their intellectual prowess, and emotional and moral depth. We teach students how to think, not what to think. We require respect for self and others. We are secular, non-ideological and apolitical.

### **We teach skills that allow children to become successful life-long learners. We focus on graduating children who:**

- Ask well thought-out questions
- Know how to investigate those questions
- Can analyze and synthesize the results of their investigation
- Communicate their findings articulately and to a diverse audience
- Treat themselves and others in a caring, responsible, and respectful manner
- Know how to create a space to learn in
- Work to be an integral part of the community

### **Our graduates are typically able to understand the concepts covered by:**

- The National Science Education Standards (through grade 12)
- Mathematics, often through geometry or beyond
- Language arts (reading, writing and oral communications) equivalent to common core grade 9 level or beyond
- A broad exposure to international social studies including humanity's rules (economic, religious, political, and cultural) and humanity's culture (art, music, literature, poetry, dance, drama, and philosophy) from the dawn of humankind to the present day

## Learning at GATE Academy

**A child learns as a whole person.** Children develop and learn across all areas—physical/sensory, social, emotional, moral, aesthetic, and cognitive.

**A child progresses through stages of cognitive development.** Children vary widely in their learning rates and personalities. All areas do not develop at the same rate, even within the same child. We focus on the successes of each individual, and what they can achieve next, rather than on what a child doesn't know or what another child may be doing.

**A child learns by doing.** Children learn from personal interaction with their surroundings, from direct experience with real objects, from talking and writing about their experiences and ideas, and from applying what they have learned. Our learning environment of core classrooms, projects, and experiences fosters active learning. Each teacher is a facilitator of learning, not just a giver of knowledge.

**A child's emotions impact learning.** Children's emotions and feelings directly affect learning. A child who feels safe asking questions and who experiences respectful listening from others is a braver learner. A child who knows mindful tools can better regulate his or her responses to challenges. A child who can self-regulate is better able to absorb and process information. A child who is able to express, question and explore *any* idea safely, without fear, becomes able to think, observe and understand for themselves and with others.

**A child's learning is a process.** Children learn to problem-solve by being personally engaged in solving problems. They learn social skills by interacting with others. We use the process approach to learning, where children learn skills in the process of becoming readers, writers, investigators, communicators, and problem solvers.

**A child learns best when the activity is meaningful and relevant.** The more meaningful an activity is to children, the more they understand, learn and remember. Within each inquiry unit, learning activities are centered on children's interests and needs.

**A child learns from social interaction.** Children learn from interacting with each other. They

learn by observing differences in others. As they work together, they discuss differing viewpoints and learn to explain their views and ideas. We use many different tools to foster social interaction, including physical education, theater, music, art, free play time outside at snack, recess and lunch, in class group discussions, and groupings with labs/hands-on work.

**A child learns by imitation.** Children learn by imitating their parents, their teachers, and their peers. Modeling is a powerful educational tool in multi-age classrooms.

## **School Structure**

Each classroom has students with a range of ages. The classroom to which each student is assigned is that student's "core" classroom. Core class is where he or she spends the majority of the school day. When a student exhibits advancement in mathematics that student may attend math class in a different classroom with students who are at that level in mathematics, and return to their core classroom afterwards. **During COVID-19, rules may have reduced mixing of children within classes.** Within a core class, each student will have challenges assigned and opportunities given that are appropriate to their level. Each core teacher has the ability to challenge each child in class to their highest potential at any given time.

Our fluid structure is designed to address two basic needs of gifted children: one is the need to spend time with their chronological (age group) peers; and the other is the need to work at their academic level.

Some children exhibit exceptional advanced social and/or emotional maturity for their chronological age. It is therefore sometimes appropriate to assign a child to a core classroom with other children who are chronologically older but at the same level of maturity as the younger child. This is balanced against academic skill set development as well.

Our goal is to create a core class match that best fits each child and each class as a dynamic group of individuals, and so that the core classes are taken together as a series of incremental steps in development of skills that allow each child to cycle through the "learner to leader" sequence repeatedly as they progress through GATE.

## **Homework Assignments and Expectations**

GATE Academy does not assign busy work at any time. Most student work takes place at school, and homework is infrequently assigned. Sometimes a student who has been unable to

fully complete in class assignments may be requested to finish assignments at home. At other times, a child may require additional practice to acquire skills and will be given work to do at home.

Once a child is in the upper school, occasionally learning may be extended outside the classroom through homework assignments geared to enhance the student's understanding of concepts, to further an independent project (such as a current event or an inquiry project), or to complete an assignment started in class.

Independent projects provide an opportunity for students to explore deeply subjects they have a personal interest in, to expand writing and analytic skills, and to develop self-discipline and time-management skills. Inquiry projects also present a valuable opportunity for students to seek out sources and people who have expertise in the student's chosen topic, furthering inspiration and collaboration. We encourage parents to contact their child's core teacher to clarify any assignments.

GATE considers independent exploration on inquiry projects vital for complete learning. True education is a partnership between the individual student, their classmates, teacher, and parents—but it is ultimately the child's own responsibility. It is important that assignments be complete, on time, and of a high quality. We will ask parents to guide students in their inquiry work only if they are struggling in school. Please let your child's core teacher know if you are assisting your child.

A central goal of inquiry projects is to allow the full measure of accomplishment and learning to rest solely with the child, rather than relying on parental aid and assistance.

## **Evaluating Progress: Grades and Assessment**

Evaluation of student progress is a continuous process. GATE Academy students receive formal report cards beginning in grade 7. We do not issue formal grades to our younger students. We evaluate whether students are doing their own best work, rather than what others do.

ALL students receive written progress reports approximately twice per inquiry period. A progress report is intended to be a quick, easy-to-understand method of communicating a child's performance to their parents. (The progress report does not replace formal conferences.)

The green, yellow, and red marks on a progress report are defined to mean the following:

- **Green means GO!** Your child is doing well in this area. The quantity and quality of work are in accord with the child's capabilities. Green indicates A or B level work (80% or greater mastery of the material.)
- **Yellow means CAUTION!** Your child could and should be doing better in this area. Yellow indicates C level work in this area (70%-79% mastery of the material.)
- **Red means STOP!** Your child is performing at an unacceptably low level, far below their capability, and this has been persisting despite various remediation efforts at school. Red marks require intervention by parents and faculty to resolve the problem with this area.

## **Newsletters**

On alternate Fridays, teachers typically email a classroom newsletter highlighting core material studied that week, key projects, assignment updates, and photos.

## **School Schedule**

GATE Academy operates on a year-round schedule of six inquiry units, lasting six to seven weeks each, followed by a break of approximately one to three weeks with specific dates depending on the federal holidays calendar.

## **Attendance**

Regular attendance and on-time arrival are critical to a child's success in school. We encourage parents to ensure that children come to school on time, as even a few minutes' tardiness disrupts the child's day and the entire classroom.

Our schedule typically includes from 180 to 195 student school days each year, averaging between 185 to 192 student school days. Students are expected to attend a minimum of 180 days.

Our school day begins promptly at 8:15 a.m. for all classes. The day ends at 3:15 p.m. Please call the front office at (415) 491-4700 if your child is going to be late or absent. If we haven't received notification of absence by noon of the same day, an unexcused absence will be



recorded on the student's attendance record. Excused absences will be determined by GATE Academy.

Under state law, a pupil who, without a valid excuse, is absent from school for three full days in one school year, or is tardy or absent for more than 30 minutes during the school day on three occasions in one school year, is considered truant. GATE Academy complies with this law.

## **Before- and After-school Program**

**When we are not affected by the COVID pandemic and associated regulations**, providing our students with unstructured, supervised social time with their cognitive peers is part of our mission. We provide before- and after-school care, from 8:00–8:15 am, and from 3:15–5:00 pm each day. There is a substantial penalty charge for late pickups from school (\$25.00 per minute).

Please contact the PE/After-school teacher for substantive questions about the after-school program, or the billing/finance director for billing questions.

## **COVID-19 - Vaccination and out-schooling information**

GATE requires vaccinations, including COVID-19 vaccinations, for onsite school attendance. GATE considers recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control, the State of California and the County of Marin, but retains sole discretion on which vaccinations/boosters are required for students to attend GATE. GATE does not provide any out-of-school alternative learning programs for students who are unvaccinated or not up to date on vaccinations required by GATE, nor for families who elect to remove students from onsite schooling.

## **Computer Damage**

GATE currently makes laptop computers available to Upper School students for academic use on projects assigned by faculty. These computers are valuable tools, both in terms of hardware, software, and firmware.

Students are not allowed to change settings on their computers or to download software. All computer upgrades and maintenance are performed by an outside vendor hired by GATE. Any changes that a student makes to the computer hardware, software or firmware can be detected by GATE's vendor, and if a student makes such changes, the cost of restoring the computer to its original issue configuration will be billed to the family. Similarly, if a student damages their

computer hardware (whether accidentally or purposefully), the cost of repair will be billed to the family.

## ***GATE Academy Student Conduct: Expectations, Disciplinary Consequences and Procedures***

### **Student Attitude and Conduct**

Student rights and responsibilities are inseparable. Students who learn and follow these benchmarks will succeed at GATE academically or socially. The GATE Academy code of conduct is based on these guiding principles:

- 1) **Consideration** for the feelings, property, time, effort of others, and for the needs of the community.
- 2) **Respect** for oneself and others, for property belonging to or shared by others, and for the learning environment of each classroom and school as a whole.
- 3) **Responsibility** for one's own conduct and speech, for safety, for appropriate use of time and materials, for work, for honesty, and for productive participation.

### **GATE Academy students have the right:**

- To be treated with kindness, fairness, and respect
- To learn and play in a safe, clean environment

### **GATE Academy students have the responsibility:**

- To arrive on time
- To self-regulate their behavior and belongings
- To treat and speak to adults and other students with kindness, fairness and respect
- To accept direction from adults in positions of authority and responsibility
- To follow the instructions of supervising adults at all times
- To help others who need assistance
- To use and share school materials and equipment with care
- To keep the community clean and safe: to clean up after oneself, to put belongings away, to pick up litter, and to dispose of trash appropriately
- To be a mindful, attentive listener while others are speaking
- To seek to understand the ideas of others

- To express ideas and describe facts using their own words
- To use indoor voices indoors
- To make certain other children feel welcome to participate in activities and games

## **Behavior in the Classroom**

Disruptive behavior in the classroom is not tolerated. It interferes with the successful learning and development of other students as well as the student who is being disruptive. GATE Academy typically follows a “three strikes and you’re out” rule concerning classroom behavior. A student who is exhibiting disruptive behavior in the classroom will typically be given a time-out in an in-classroom area, and may return to work/class activities on their own initiative. If the behavior occurs again, the student is given another in-class time-out or a time-out in an adjoining area, returning to normal activities at the teacher’s request. The third warning means that the student is required to leave the classroom, usually to the administrative area where a staff member is present to supervise, and will not be allowed to return until the instructor decides it is appropriate. Disruptive students may temporarily lose recess and/or other privileges.

The classroom teacher has discretion at all times to modify this series of consequences based upon the type of conduct that occurs in their classroom. Some behavior may lead to a student’s immediate removal from the classroom, and/or more serious consequences as outlined further in this section. **During the COVID pandemic, GATE Academy students are required to follow additional rules and guidelines as set forth by the Marin Health and Human Services and Marin County Office of Education. These rules must be followed in classrooms and onsite for a student to be allowed to attend GATE Academy.**

## **Basic Consequences for Irresponsibility and Misconduct**

A student’s conduct in class or outside of class will affect their privileges to participate in school activities. The revocation of privileges—the exclusion of a student from certain activities due to their irresponsible behavior or other misconduct—is intended to serve the community by maintaining the standards by which we can continue in our mission.

Parents will be notified of an incident involving misconduct if, in the judgment of a teacher or administrator, it is serious enough to warrant a parent’s immediate involvement. In such a case, parents may be requested to meet with faculty, administrators or staff to discuss the incident. Parents’ prompt attendance at such meetings is mandatory. At the school’s sole

discretion, the offending student(s) may not be allowed in school until such a meeting takes place.

Consequences of poor behavior choices may include a variety of restrictions or remedies including, but not limited to:

- 1) a period of detention for reflection and an oral or written response to the situation
- 2) the cleaning, repairing, or replacing of property
- 3) the preparation of a lesson to reinforce for self and others the value of the principles involved
- 4) assistance to other students, teachers, or members of the staff
- 5) exclusion from class or class activities, field trips and similar events
- 6) probation, suspension, or expulsion as described below.

## **Probation Contract**

Under some circumstances, when a student persistently undermines the abilities of others to build and maintain a productive educational community, or the student does not do their own work but instead copies that of others or uses test answers provided by others, the student(s) in question may be placed on probation. Probation covers participation in school or class activities, including all-school activities or assemblies, field trips, special class activities such as cooking, recess, aftercare, graduation or commencement ceremonies, and class celebrations. In such a case, a student and their parents will be expected to sign a Probation Contract. The terms of the contract will explain the reason for the probation, the privileges revoked, and how and under what circumstances they might be regained.

The issuance of a Probation Contract assumes that the student possesses the ability to rejoin the community fully. It provides the opportunity for the student to correct their behavior, and thereby re-establish the trust necessary for the school to permit their participation in activities, by giving assurance that they can do so with respect and dignity. Under such a contract, a student's behavior will be monitored on a daily basis and decisions will be made by the school regarding participation for each activity.

Placing a student on probation is at the sole discretion of the school. The final authority regarding probation rests with the Head of School, who shall consult with the Dean of Students, and may consult with other faculty members. A parent or student shall have no right to appeal the school's decision regarding probation. A student's failure to fulfill the terms of the

Probation Contract will result in further disciplinary action.

Certain serious, hazardous or dangerous actions or omissions, or persistent violations of or disregard for guiding principles or specific rules or instructions, may result in a student's immediate suspension or expulsion from the school with no option for a Probation Contract.

## **Suspension or Expulsion**

In the case of any matter of a serious, violent or persistent nature, and with consideration of facts and circumstances, a child may be suspended from school for a period of time deemed appropriate by the Head of School, who shall consult with the Dean of Students, and may consult with other faculty members. The parents of a child suspended in such a case, if expulsion remains a possible consequence, may be requested to withdraw their child from the school before an expulsion order is invoked.

Certain serious or persistent offenses may result directly in immediate suspension or expulsion by administrative action. Such offenses may include, but are not limited to: violence against or abuse of another person; harassment of any sort including bullying or cyberbullying; disrespect directed toward an adult acting on behalf of the school in a position of authority or responsibility; noncompliance regarding safety of self or others; vandalism or theft; the possession of controlled substances in any manner; or possession of a weapon or facsimile of a weapon in any manner.

The final authority regarding expulsion rests with the Head of School, who shall consult with the Dean of Students, and may consult with other faculty members.

## **Bullying**

Bullying is not tolerated. Bullying is a serious form of intentional harassment of one or more others in the community that substantially interferes with a sense of intellectual, emotional or physical safety in one's school community. Bullying includes, but is not limited to, directed physical or verbal aggression (hitting, kicking, choking, taunting, teasing, threatening, ridiculing, etc.), relational aggression (harming or threatening to harm relationships or acceptance, friendships, or group exclusion; fomenting divisiveness or disrespect), emotional aggression (unkind teasing, threatening, or intimidating others).

## **Cyber-Bullying**

Cyber-bullying is not tolerated. Cyber-bullying includes digital/electronic conduct towards any member of the school community that is inappropriate, hurtful, harmful, intimidating, factionalizing, disrespectful, anonymous, or threatening. Cyber-bullying includes but is not limited to slurs, jokes, verbal, graphic or offensive conduct, published to others in any digital/electronic format, including on websites, instant messaging or texting, online chatting, emails, or by using camera phones, webcams, digital recording devices or other forms of technology. It includes actions occurring outside school on personal computers/electronic devices as well as during school time.

Community members who feel that they have been the victims of such misuses of technology should not erase the offending material. They should print a copy and immediately report the incident to the Head of School. All reports of harassment in cyberspace by anyone in the school community will be investigated fully, including a police report if necessary. Sanctions may include, but are not limited to loss of computer privileges, detention, probation, suspension, separation, or expulsion from the school.

GATE Academy strongly encourages parents to monitor their children's use of technology and partner with the school in educating children about the potential dangers inherent in cyberspace communications.

## **Behavior Outside of School**

A student's behavior outside of school can have an impact on their academic progress and emotional well-being. Outside behavior that is brought to the attention of the school and is considered:

- 1) harmful to oneself
- 2) harmful to others (e.g. bullying and cyberbullying)
- 3) damaging to the reputation of the school or its staff
- 4) illegal

will result in the school's involvement. GATE Academy will help to implement resolution and/or repair strategies, and may take disciplinary action against the offending student(s), which may include suspension or expulsion.

## **Authority of the School Administration**

Guidelines set forth in this or other sections of the GATE Academy Handbook, regarding the responsibilities of students, their conduct and consequences for misconduct, shall not be

construed as to limit the authority of the administration. The administration maintains the authority, as needs arise, to add items or definitions, to expand the scope of, or to interpret matters relevant to circumstances in order to protect the health and welfare of the student body, faculty, and staff.

## **GATE Academy Netiquette Policy**

GATE Academy is a K-8 school. An essential part of K-8 student education is learning to stay focused and on task with school work and projects, not to be distracted by electronic media, and to exercise self-control and respect for others. Another essential part of K-8 education is learning to communicate directly with others in person. Important aspects of in-person communication involve skills of active listening, effective speaking, thoughtful and respectful language, and noticing and understanding non-verbal messages that are conveyed by facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, and body language.

GATE Academy also recognizes the value of computers and other electronic devices in an educational setting. Electronic devices and the Internet can be used to obtain access to a wide range of information, to communicate certain types of information quickly and over long distances, and they can be convenient as tools to create, record, and store student work. For these reasons, GATE Academy provides wireless Internet access throughout the building, and permits Upper School students to use school-provided computers on school premises during certain classes, for certain specific purposes, only as specifically directed by their teachers.

## **Limitations on Electronic Device Usage at GATE Academy**

Student use of school computers and access to the Internet as directed by faculty is a **privilege** and not a right. **GATE Academy students may not use electronic devices—whether school-issued computers or their own personal electronic devices—for any other reason except as directed by faculty.** For example, while on school premises, students may not make or receive phone calls, send text messages, participate in online chat, send emails, use online social media, use Apple watch type devices, or otherwise employ electronic media to communicate with anyone. In an emergency, a staff member will make necessary calls, not students. Teachers have both the ability and the right to monitor students' computer use for any reason, at any time.

## **Limitations on Use of Family Contact Information**

To enhance the administration and operation of the school, GATE Academy gives its families a

directory that includes contact information, including student names, and phone numbers, email addresses, and physical addresses, that would otherwise be private information and unavailable through any other means. GATE Academy recognizes that use of its parent email list can be valuable for communication between parents, and accordingly approves limited use of email between parents **solely** in relation to issues concerning volunteering, fundraising, and hospitality.

**GATE Academy directory information may not be used to express opinion, including statements regarding other students, staff members, or other families, or for any inflammatory or malicious exchange concerning school business, school policy, school administration, school faculty, school students, school families, or school staff. The directory information may not be used for advertising services or products. The directory information may not be used for soliciting or promoting any ideological, social, doctrinal or political position or agenda, or other cause, for any purpose.**

GATE Academy supports open and constructive communication between parents, students and staff and endorses appropriate channels for grievances. Matters of a strong emotional or volatile nature must always be dealt with in a person-to-person manner. Parents/Primary care providers must be open and available for person-to-person discussions involving sensitive issues, rather than resorting to electronic media exchanges.



**Parent copy:**

**Parent Agreement - Acknowledgement of Handbook Policies**

*(to be signed by parents of all student users under the age of eighteen)*

As parent or guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ *(Name of Student)* I have read the GATE Academy Parent Handbook. I understand that these policies are designed for educational purposes and effective school operations. In addition, I understand that GATE Academy has taken reasonable steps to control my student’s access to the Internet, but understand that GATE Academy cannot guarantee that all controversial information will be inaccessible to student users. I agree that I will not hold GATE Academy responsible for materials acquired on the Internet.

I accept full responsibility for Internet and electronic device supervision when my child’s use is outside the school setting. I will responsibly use contact information of other GATE Academy families and staff only as outlined above. I further understand that any violation of the policies by me or my child may lead to school disciplinary action, up to and including expulsion, and/or appropriate legal action may be initiated. I have discussed these policies with my child.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

***Keep this for your records – sign and return the extra copy on the following page.***

**Sign and return to GATE’s front office:**

**Parent Agreement - Acknowledgement of Handbook Policies**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

SCHOOL COPY