

# **Operating Agreement Between The Goleta Family School Program and the Goleta Union School District**

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## **Introduction**

This document summarizes and defines the Guiding Principles of Goleta Family School (GFS) and the contractual agreement between the program and Goleta Union School District. It is rooted in the original abstract for GFS approved by the Goleta Union School District Board in 1981 and the revision approved in 1998. The essential philosophy and goals of the program, as stated in both 1981 and 1998, remain unchanged (see attachment 1), but we believe it important to address how the program's educational strategies, goals, and governance have evolved, while keeping the way clear for future evolution.

Education at GFS can be described in many ways. It is experiential, humanistic, child centered; it is cooperative, constructivist; it embraces a philosophy that learning happens everywhere and that education should not be limited to the confines of the classroom. Our multiage classrooms reflect the belief that learning takes place on a continuum, rather than in a series of discrete steps.

It is a cooperative learning environment; enriched by the participation of parents/guardians at every level in helping the teachers implement the curriculum.

At Goleta Family School, a valued program of choice within the Goleta Union School District, the teachers are empowered to teach the Standards of the State of California using creative, engaging, experiential, child-centric instructional strategies.

# Part I: Philosophy and Goals

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## Overview

**At Goleta Family School, a public, tuition-free alternative to the traditional public school setting for children in kindergarten through grade six, we are committed to project based, constructivist, inquiry-based learning in multiage classrooms.** Our multiage program provides an educational environment in which students can learn at their own pace in a non-competitive atmosphere. GFS strives to provide a challenging, self-rewarding atmosphere that leads children to feel valued and teaches them to value others. We work to foster an appreciation of education through the discovery that learning is an exciting part of life, both in and out of the classroom.

**Learning takes place everywhere, at all times, and is an active process.** Our philosophy recognizes and supports the premise that positive self- image enables students to become active participants in their education. Discovery, exploration, and choice in learning give the children the tools they will need to succeed.

**GFS strives to educate the whole child.** Fostering positive qualities such as self-reliance, initiative, kindness, spontaneity, resourcefulness, courage, creativity, responsibility, cooperation, and community is as important as the acquisition of knowledge. The promotion of active, healthy bodies, not only as a foundation for life-long habits, but because physically active children are more likely to succeed academically, is also an essential part of educating the whole child. Curriculum and school wide activities, in and out of the classroom, will support this overall set of goals.

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## Multiage Education

**Multiage educational practices are grounded in the philosophy that learning is a non-linear experience and that every child has the right to learn at his or her own pace.** Multiage classes are purposefully structured to include a span of grade levels. The teacher takes advantage of the resulting diversity to encourage students to help each other, and to take leadership roles. Our goal is for students to learn to be active participants in the life of their community by working together in small groups. The teachers facilitate these small groups, providing students with the opportunity to experience some of their own problem-solving strategies when learning new concepts. This allows them to take risks in a safe environment, supported by their peers and teachers. Children learn best in a supportive atmosphere with individual attention as needed.

Within the multiage environment, **GFS prioritizes subject integration and project based learning as teaching strategies, with the teachers planning units of study that address**

**educational standards in more than one core area.** The high interest content of these units leads to a greater level of intrinsic motivation in the students. When students are engaged by multi-layered learning activities, they focus more, learn more, and, because they have high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety, they are more likely to make deeper connections and retain the knowledge.

**Field trips of all kinds are a crucial component in the ongoing success of the program,** allowing students to put the concepts and ideas discussed in class into a real-world context. The teachers in Goleta Family School, individually and collectively, will determine when and where the children in one or more classes will benefit from a field trip, as those excursions are directly related to the educational goals and methods of the program.

**Among many other types of field trips, outdoor school is an important option in supporting the academic and non-academic curricular goals of the program.** These goals include hands on field experience in the natural sciences; the development of a sense of community and trust among students, teachers, and supporting parents; the opportunity for children to learn through discovery; nurturing qualities such as courage, self-reliance, and teamwork; and the promotion of active, healthy bodies.

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## **Environmental Education and Sustainability**

**The GFS community is committed to sustainability.** We work to foster a high level of ecological literacy and environmental awareness in our students through a combination of daily practice—recycling, picking up trash, and so forth—and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

**The GFS curriculum will continue to have a strong emphasis on environmental education.** Our environmental education program will focus on developing familiarity with local and regional natural environments, developing the ability to identify and understand environmental problems, and the ability to critically and creatively formulate and apply solutions to these problems. GFS will seek opportunities to lead or participate in restoration and other environmental work within local watersheds.

In-class curriculum will incorporate environmental themes like conservation, environmental design, sustainability, habitat and communities, climate change, environmental justice, and ecological agriculture. In addition to, and in support of in-class lessons, outdoor and experiential learning, including outdoor school days, field trips, and camping trips, will be an essential component of our environmental education curriculum, which strives to provide our students opportunities to observe, relax, restore, experiment and play in nature. Learning out of doors reinforces our connection with the natural world, an important component in teaching children to be stewards of the environment.

**The Goleta Family School will maintain a school garden, which will serve as an outdoor classroom and provide opportunities for experiential learning.**

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## **Community and Social curriculum**

**GFS utilizes the Tribes Learning Community curriculum to help foster a sense of community within the individual classrooms and the entire student body.** The Tribes curriculum is designed to foster a positive school and classroom environment, with the goal of improving behavior and learning, and give students the tools to work collaboratively.

**Whenever possible, 4th through 6th grade students at Goleta Family School will have the opportunity to become Peer Mediators,** helping other students resolve conflicts on the playground in a peaceful manner. The goals of a Peer Mediation Program are to decrease unresolved conflicts between children, prevent small conflicts from becoming bigger problems, and help children develop leadership skills that can be used throughout their lives.

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## **Parent/Guardian Involvement**

**Parents/guardians (hereafter referred to as “parents”) are an integral part of the instructional program and, while final decisions about curriculum are left to the teachers, they have the opportunity to be involved in decisions affecting their child’s education.** They are expected to take an active role in the educational process through weekly participation on the campus. That participation can take many forms, including facilitating small group work, teaching whole class lessons in which they share special interests or skills, and assisting the teacher in ways that serve the individual classroom or the school as a whole. While the default is to volunteer in the classroom, parent participation in the classroom is at the teachers’ discretion. If a teacher feels the classroom participation is not serving the community, then that parent will be given other responsibilities.

The second component of parent involvement at GFS is the Goleta Family School Parent Teacher Association, or PTA. The GFS PTA is a non-profit organization under the umbrella of the California PTA and is subject to the same regulations. The primary role of a PTA is to build strong working relationships among parents, teachers, and schools, in support of students. In particular, the GFS PTA works to support the teachers in carrying out the curricular goals of the program. Monthly PTA meetings make it possible for every parent to have a voice, to raise concerns and engage in creative problem solving with other parents and with the teachers.

Every parent will be assigned to a Goleta Family School PTA committee, based on his or her interests and talents. These committees, which fall generally into the categories of enrichment, fundraising, community building, and outreach, are absolutely essential to the day-to-day operations of GFS. GFS families are expected to consider the way their individual gifts and

interests can best serve the community and follow through on that commitment. The vital importance of parent participation in carrying out the curricular goals of the program cannot be overstated. The program won't work without committed parent involvement, both in the classroom and as part of the GFS PTA.

GFS is a community in which students, parents, and teachers are actively involved in teaching and learning from one another. Everyone shares in community decisions and responsibilities. Through cooperative involvement in learning, each student, parent, and staff member is a partner in GFS.

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## **The Role of the Principal**

It is imperative that the principal of the campus on which GFS is housed embodies the basic premise underlying alternative programs of choice in the state of California: that there is more than one way to educate children; education is not "one size fits all". The site principal must be flexible enough to fully support a program on his or her campus that departs in significant ways from the norm. A GFS principal should:

1. Understand multiage philosophy.
2. Value GFS teachers and parents as equal collaborators in the campus community.
3. Be familiar with the GFS operating agreement and be committed to supporting it.
4. Recognize the need for additional learning spaces for multiage classrooms.
5. Provide necessary material resources for classrooms.
6. Allocate campus resources equitably.
7. Grant autonomy to GFS teachers, who must work collaboratively to develop their individual and collective curricula according to the GFS operating agreement.
8. Maintain open lines of communication with teachers and parents and be an advocate for the program at the district level, as a valued "choice program" in the district.

## Part II: Operating Agreement

This program shall be known as the Goleta Family School, also referred to as GFS.

GFS shall function in accordance with the philosophy and goals set forth in Part I of this document, which represents the latest revision and clarification of the *Goleta Family School Abstract and Guidelines for Parent Participation in the Classroom*, approved in 1981 by the Goleta Union School District Board.

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### Location

In choosing a site for GFS, consideration shall be given to the following:

1. Appropriateness of the room(s) available to form a complex that consists of the necessary number of classrooms plus access to additional learning spaces, to facilitate small group work.
2. Flexibility and willingness of the principal to accept an on-site program whose operation will deviate in significant ways from other classrooms on campus.

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### Operations

1. All decisions that affect the operation of GFS at the school site shall be agreed to by the teachers, representatives of the parents/guardians of pupils enrolled in the program, and the principal.
2. Hours of operation shall be in accordance with the hours of operation of other programs at the school site.
3. GFS shall be allowed to use all facilities available to the other students and teachers at the site.
4. Funds shall be allocated to GFS in the same amounts per pupil as funds allocated to the site for other programs.
5. Funds raised by or donated to the GFS shall be used for program enrichment as determined by the GFS Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Materials and equipment purchased by the GFS PTA shall become the property of the Goleta Union School District for use in the GFS program.
6. GFS students shall be subject to the same disciplinary standards as other children in the school when outside the classrooms of the GFS.

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### Employment

Vacancies for teaching positions at GFS shall be made available for transfer in the same manner as other vacancies within the Goleta Union School District. A Selection Committee made up of

current GFS teachers, the principal, and three representatives of parents/guardians of pupils enrolled in the program shall interview all current District certificated employees who apply. That Selection Committee shall make a recommendation to the Director of Personnel Services who shall, with the Superintendent, make the final decision regarding transfers.

If a vacancy for a teaching position needs to be filled from outside the District, the committee shall interview selected candidates from the list of currently approved District candidates for employment. The committee shall make a recommendation to the Director of Personnel Services who shall, with the Superintendent, make the final decision regarding the employment of a teacher new to the district.

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## Enrollment

1. GFS will consist of three classrooms. The program will accept no more than 9 students per grade level, for a total of 63 students in K-6. Once the maximum is reached, the prospective students will be placed on a waiting list. The waiting lists are maintained for each grade level and follow the cohort of students at the grade level as they progress through the program.
  - a. The GFS Multiage classes receive the same aide hours as other multi-grade classes in the district.
  - b. There will be no change in number of classrooms and students at Goleta Family School without the full agreement of current teachers and parents.
  - c. Students will be divided into classrooms at the discretion of the teachers. We aim to maintain class sizes that reflect the district's average caps for upper and lower grades.
  - d. Numbers can flex lower or higher, at teachers' discretion, if they will normalize within 2 years.
2. If the number of children applying to GFS exceeds the maximum number of spaces available, siblings of students enrolled in the program shall be given priority. A lottery shall be held to determine enrollment if there are more sibling applicants than space in GFS. If additional spaces are available after siblings are placed, enrollment shall be determined by lottery. In addition, the following aspects will be considered:
  - a. The ratio of males to females (no more than a 40/60 split either way).
  - b. The diversity needed to reflect that of the Goleta District community (i.e. race, ethnicity, language, special needs).
3. Central to the philosophy of the GFS is the active participation of parents/guardians in the direct instruction of pupils and in the support of extra-curricular activities. Therefore, prior to enrollment of their children in the program, parents/guardians shall be fully informed of the philosophy and expectations of the program and will know that they are expected to actively participate in the school program (Attachment 2).
4. Applications to the program will only be accepted if parents have attended an information night and a tour and are willing to sign the participation agreement (Attachment 3).

5. Students enrolling in GFS must live within the boundaries of the Goleta Union School District.
6. Participation in the program will require an intra-district transfer request.
7. Families may be denied their transfer status and returned to their home school if they refuse to follow the guidelines based on the GFS philosophy.
8. Excessive tardiness, unexcused absences, or student behavioral issues may result in a revocation of the transfer.
9. No transportation services are provided by Goleta Union School District.

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## **Curriculum, Assessment, and Testing**

1. GFS students shall be exposed to the same subject matter covered in the current state standards. In the multiage classroom configuration of GFS, this requirement may be addressed through content sequencing over a 2 or 3 year period.
2. GFS shall not be required to use board-adopted curriculum, programs, or materials (hereafter referred to as instructional materials), but those shall be made available if requested. Alternate instructional materials shall be aligned to current state standards.
3. GFS prioritizes subject integration and project based learning.
4. In planning curriculum to support state educational standards, teachers will have authority to determine the structure of the instructional day/week, in collaboration with the principal so that all campus scheduling needs may be met. This includes determination of instructional times and durations, within limits established by the California Education Code and recommendations provided within the state's instructional frameworks for core academic subjects.
5. In evaluating Field Trip requests, the district and/or the principal will bear in mind the educational philosophy, goals, and methods of GFS.
6. GFS students shall take all state-mandated tests and participate in district-wide progress monitoring not aligned to specific curriculum.
7. Progress monitoring in GFS will be standards based.
  - a. Assessments shall be consistent with instructional strategies and materials in use in the classrooms, and may include but are not limited to rubrics, public presentations, portfolios (setting and working towards a goal), and service learning projects.
  - b. In no case will GFS administer assessments based specifically on instructional materials not in use in the program.
  - c. GFS teachers will have access to all resources available to all other teachers in the district.
8. Parent Teacher Conferences will be utilized for collaborative goal setting, based on students' social and academic progress.
9. At the end of each school year, teachers will provide an individualized narrative assessment of student growth and achievement relative to the stated goals and educational principles of the program, in lieu of a standard report card.

## **Attachment 1**

### **Philosophy and Goals of the Goleta Family School**

**Last Approved 13 July 1998**

#### **Philosophy**

The philosophy of the Goleta Family School is based upon the writings of the humanistic educators, in particular John Holt. The major tenets of this philosophy follow:

- All human beings, including children, deserve respect for what they are.
- Children are intrinsically motivated to learn.
- Learning by discovery is a pleasurable experience and, as such, is self-reinforcing.
- Young children are capable of making decisions about their own lives.
- Children develop at different rates, with different learning styles, and have special interests, needs, and objectives.
- Children learn best in the absence of rewards, punishment, criticism, comparison, value judgments, or coercion of any kind.
- Children learn best in a supportive atmosphere with individual attention as needed.

#### **Goals**

- High self-esteem: a sense of oneself as a person who matters and has an effect on the social and physical world.
- Autonomy: the ability to be self-governing.
- Cooperation: the ability to enjoy other people, to appreciate those different from oneself, to be sensitive to others and to interact effectively.
- Creative self-expression: the ability to use any media to make novel associations.
- Competence in and the enjoyment of reading, writing, and mathematical concepts.
- Acquisition of knowledge about all aspects of the world.
- Creative thinking: the ability to invent appropriate responses for situations while taking into account long-range consequences.
- Preservation of natural curiosity and desire for learning.

## **Attachment 2**

### **Summary Guidelines for Parent/Guardian Participation in the Goleta Family School (1998, reviewed and updated 2016)**

The Goleta Family School functions as a parent/guardian cooperative, and enrollment of students in the program implies a willingness to be a full participating parent/guardian. All parents/guardians are expected to complete a parent/guardian participation form at the beginning of each school year acknowledging and accepting the following expectations and stipulations.

Parents/guardians, or a designated representative (grandparent, family friend, nanny) are expected to:

1. Participate two hours each week in the classroom for each child enrolled in the program.
  - A. Parents/guardians who cannot participate in the classroom are expected to arrange alternate participation activities with the classroom teacher(s).
  - B. If a teacher feels the classroom participation is not serving the community, then that parent will be given other responsibilities.
2. Serve on a PTA committee and participate fully.
3. Assist with fundraisers.
4. Take a turn in supplying a healthy community snack for each school day of the academic year, which will be consumed in the area immediately outside the classrooms.
5. Participate in and drive on field trips. In order to drive students other than their own, parents/guardians need to get a fingerprint clearance through the Goleta Union School District office (one time only) and file an updated vehicle information form at the beginning of each school year.
6. Ensure that students have transportation to and from school each day, as the Goleta Union School District does not provide transportation.

Goleta Family School
Application Form

Lottery # \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Parent(s):

Address:

City, ZIP

Phone numbers

Email Addresses:

Please provide as much information as possible, so that we may contact you quickly when there is an opening.

How did you find out about GFS?

Do you have any special concerns about your child/children?

What is your current assigned local school?

Why do you want to come to GFS?

Please list all children you wish to enroll in GFS.

Table with 5 columns: Child, Gender, Date of Birth, Grade at time of entrance, Child's current (pre)school or local school. It contains four empty rows for data entry.

Goleta Family School (GFS) is able to provide the best environment for your child with your help and consistent support and participation.

Are you able to work in the classroom for two hours each week for each child enrolled in the program? Y/N

Will you be able to attend two field trips each year? Y/N

Will you be able to attend at least one night or weekend event each month? Y/N

I/we understand that GFS is a community in which students, parents, and teachers are actively involved in teaching and learning from one another. Everyone shares in community decisions and responsibilities. Through cooperative involvement in learning, each student, parent, and staff member is a partner in GFS.

*If my/our child is accepted into the program, I/we will commit two hours per week in the classroom for each child enrolled in the program and one hour per week, on average, toward PTA committee work.*

Signature	Date
Signature	Date

*Completion of this form does not guarantee your child enrollment in GFS.*

### Communication Notes

<i>Toured with</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>Prospective Parent Night Y/N</i>	<i>Date Attended</i>

<i>1. Today's Date</i>	<i>Recorded by</i>
<i>Notes:</i>	
<i>2. Today's Date</i>	<i>Recorded by</i>
<i>Notes:</i>	
<i>3. Today's Date</i>	<i>Recorded by</i>
<i>Notes:</i>	