The **Playbook**

Acton Academy Salado



2026

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Acton Academy Salado

Section 1: Introduction & Vision

1.1 Welcome to Acton Academy !

Welcome to a place where young people dare to be great and do work that matters.
At Acton Academy, every child is seen as a hero on a unique journey — a journey to discover their genius and use it to change the world.
Acton is not a traditional school. It is a learner-driven community, built on the conviction that each person has a gift the world needs.
In this playbook, you'll find the guiding principles, systems, and tools that protect and sustain Acton's five core promises — so every hero can thrive.
"We are not preparing children for the real world. They are already in it."
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1.3 Our Beliefs

We believe:
Each person has a unique gift that can change the world in a profound way.
In learning by doing, through real-world challenges and reflection.
In the power of a tightly connected family of lifelong learners.
In protecting economic, political, and religious freedom — the soil in which personal liberty and responsibility flourish.

1.2 Our Mission :

Our mission is to inspire each person who enters our doors to find a calling that will change the world.
We believe true education is not about memorizing facts — it's about:
Learning to learn: to be curious, adaptable, and self-directed;
Learning to do: to solve problems, create value, and take action;
Learning to be: to build character, make tough choices, and grow through challenges

1.4 Using This Playbook

This playbook is designed to be:
Clear and actionable — so you can protect and reinforce the promises
Inspiring — to remind you of the hero's potential
Return to this introduction whenever you need to remember why you are here, and why every day at Acton matters.

1.5 Why the Promises Matter

The five Core Promises are not just guiding statements — they are sacred commitments to our learners and their families.

Section 2: The Five Core Promises Explained

Acton Academy's promises serve as a compass to keep our mission true. These are non-negotiable, enduring commitments that guide every decision in the studio. This section breaks down the five core promises so you can understand, protect, and apply them in daily practice.

Our Promises

Through **Socratic guiding** and **experiential learning**, we commit to encouraging every member of our community to:

1. **Begin a Hero's Journey** — embracing challenges and growth.
2. **Learn to be** a curious, independent, lifelong learner.
3. **Develop a deep respect** for economic, political, and religious freedoms.
4. **Cherish the arts**, the wonders of the physical world, and the mysteries of life on Earth.
5. **Discover your most precious gifts** and learn to use them to serve others.

See detailed Owner, Parent, Guide, and Learner promises here.

2.1 Promise #1: Begin a Hero's Journey

What it means: Each learner embarks on a unique journey filled with challenges, discoveries, allies, and mentors. The struggles and triumphs shape courage, grit, and wisdom.

How to honor this promise: Encourage learners to embrace challenges and setbacks as opportunities to grow. Use goal-setting and reflection tools like Hero Boards and Journey Maps. Support learners in ownership of their own path and choices.

Key practices:

- Hero Boards showcasing goals and character growth
- Regular check-ins focused on progress and mindset
- Studio exhibitions celebrating personal journeys and achievements

2.2 Promise #2: Learn to Be a Curious, Independent, Lifelong Learner

What it means: We nurture a mindset of curiosity, self-direction, and resilience — essential for lifelong learning.

How to honor this promise: Use Socratic questioning to spark curiosity and critical thinking. Provide voice and choice in learning pathways and projects. Encourage self-reflection and iterative improvement.

Key practices:

- Socratic discussions instead of lectures
- Personalized learning plans and quests
- Reflection journals and peer feedback sessions

2.3 Promise #3: Develop a Deep Respect for Economic, Political, and Religious Freedoms

What it means: Freedom is the soil for personal growth and responsible citizenship.

How to honor this promise: Teach the value and responsibilities of freedom in daily studio culture. Model respect for diverse perspectives and beliefs. Encourage learners to practice accountability and ethical decision-making.

Key practices:

- Studio contracts and norms co-created with learners
- Town Hall meetings encouraging open dialogue
- Apprenticeships and projects emphasizing real-world responsibility

2.4 Promise #4: Cherish the Arts, Wonders of the Physical World, and the Mysteries of Life on Earth

What it means: We cultivate awe, creativity, and respect for the richness of life and our planet.

How to honor this promise: Integrate arts, science, and nature into quests and projects. Encourage exploration of beauty, wonder, and the unknown. Celebrate creative expression and scientific inquiry.

Key practices:

- Nature-based learning experiences and expeditions
- Art and music projects showcasing learner creativity
- Science challenges that connect theory with the natural world



2.5 Promise #5: Discover Your Most Precious Gifts and Learn to Use Them to Serve Others

What it means: Every learner's unique talents are valuable and meant to be shared in service to the community and world.

How to honor this promise: Provide opportunities for learners to identify and develop their strengths. Encourage community service, mentorship, and apprenticeships. Celebrate contributions that benefit others.

Key practices:

- Strengths assessments and personalized goal-setting
- Service-learning projects and apprenticeships
- Public exhibitions of work that impacts others



2.6 Living Out the Promises

These promises are not static; they live in the daily choices, systems, and relationships that make Acton Academy unique. Whether you are a guide, a parent, or a learner, return to these promises often. Ask yourself:

- Are we embracing the Hero's Journey?
- Are we cultivating curiosity and independence?
- Are we honoring freedom and responsibility?
- Are we inspiring awe and creativity?
- Are we helping learners discover and serve with their gifts?

If the answer ever feels like "no," pause, reflect, and adjust — because the promises are the foundation of everything we do.

Section 3: The Learner-Driven Environment

A learner-driven environment is the foundation of Acton Academy. It shifts power from adults to learners, so young heroes experience freedom, responsibility, and the authentic struggle that leads to growth. This section describes what that looks like and how to protect it.



3.1 What Is a Learner-Driven Community?

At Acton, learners: Set their own goals Track their progress Manage their own time Hold each other accountable

Guides act as Socratic questioners, never rescuers or lecturers. This culture helps learners develop ownership and agency, essential skills for their hero's journey.

Core principles of a learner-driven environment:

- Freedom with responsibility
- Trust, earned through demonstrated accountability
- Peer-to-peer leadership
- Growth through challenge and feedback



3.2 Self-Paced Learning

Heroes move at their own pace rather than being pushed through a rigid curriculum. Mastery matters more than speed.

Key practices:

- Core skills software for math, reading, and writing
- Weekly SMART goals set by learners
- Progress tracking boards visible in the studio
- Badges awarded for true mastery, not seat time

The guide's role:

- Help learners set and track goals
- Celebrate progress
- Challenge excuses and encourage perseverance



3.3 Socratic Guiding

Guides never lecture. They ask powerful questions to spark curiosity, critical thinking, and self-discovery.

Socratic strategies include: Open-ended questions Thoughtful silence Respectful challenges Following up with "Why?" or "How do you know?"

The mindset of a Socratic guide:

- Believe that every learner is capable
- Resist the temptation to rescue
- Trust the process, even when it looks messy

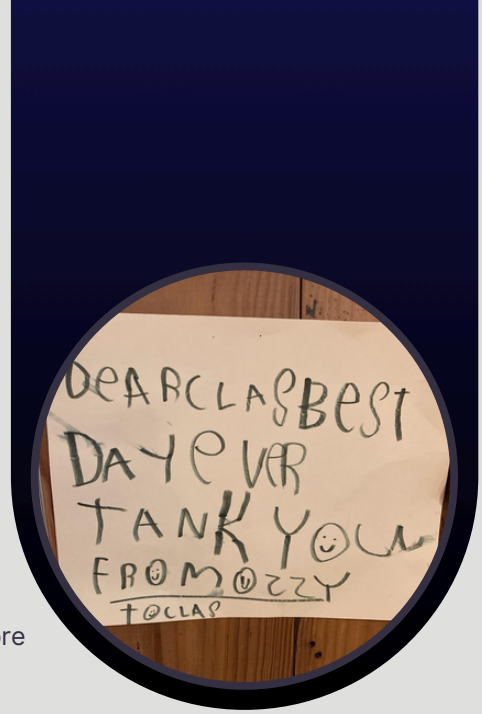
3.4 Contracts, Freedoms, and Consequences

In a learner-driven studio, rules are made *with* learners, not *for* them. These are spelled out in contracts created collaboratively.

Key contract elements:

- Studio promises and norms
- Rights and responsibilities
- Specific freedoms earned through trust
- Clear consequences for breaking agreements

Why this matters: Contracts empower heroes to own their community and make choices that protect everyone's learning.



3.5 Peer Accountability and Leadership

In a learner-driven community, learners hold each other accountable more powerfully than any adult ever could.

Systems that build peer accountability:

- Daily stand-up meetings to share goals
- Weekly peer check-ins
- Running partner systems (accountability buddies)
- Conflict resolution systems
- Studio town meetings

Benefits: Learners see their peers as allies They learn to resolve conflict independently They build authentic leadership skills

3.6 Celebrating Growth

Growth, not perfection, is the goal. A learner-driven environment celebrates effort, resilience, and courage to keep trying.

Ways to celebrate growth:

- Weekly launches (inspirational group talks)
- Exhibitions of learning
- Studio showcases
- Badges and public displays of achievement

3.7 Sustaining a Learner-Driven Environment

A learner-driven studio requires constant vigilance. It can be tempting to slip back into adult-driven habits. Protect the environment by:

- Staying true to the Socratic method
- Reinforcing contracts and freedoms
- Holding even the most talented learners accountable
- Modeling respect for learners' choices

If you see the environment shifting back to traditional top-down patterns, pause, reflect, and reset. Protecting the learner-driven model is protecting the promises.

Section 4: Key Roles & Responsibilities

At Acton Academy Salado, a thriving learner-driven studio depends on clearly defined roles. Every person — learners, guides, and parents — plays a vital part in protecting the promises and sustaining a culture of excellence.

4.1 The Role of Guides

Guides are not traditional teachers. They are **Socratic mentors** who create the conditions for heroes to flourish.

Key responsibilities of a Guide:

Ask, don't tell — Use powerful questions to inspire reflection, growth, and courage.
Hold the promises sacred — Defend the learning environment from adult-driven habits or pressure.
Protect the studio culture — Support systems like contracts, conflict resolution, and town meetings.
Challenge heroes to grow — Offer honest, respectful feedback rather than praise or punishment.
Resist rescuing — Let heroes struggle through challenges so they can grow resilience.
Model curiosity and character — Show what lifelong learning looks like through your own actions.

Remember: The greatest gift a guide can give is faith in the learner's ability to solve their own problems.

4.2 The Role of Parents

Parents are powerful allies in a learner-driven community. They trust the system, support the promises, and model a growth mindset at home.

Key responsibilities of parents:

Understand the learner-driven model and its benefits. Communicate positively and respectfully with guides. Avoid rescuing or solving every challenge for their hero. Celebrate authentic effort, not just results. Honor the Parent Covenant — committing to the promises and the long-term vision of Acton. Provide a supportive home environment for goal-setting, accountability, and reflective conversation.

Remember: Parents shape the hero's journey by showing trust and confidence in their child's agency.

4.3 The Role of Learners

Learners at Acton are heroes in charge of their own journey. They hold tremendous responsibility and power within the community.

Key responsibilities of learners:

Commit to the studio contract and its norms. Set weekly SMART goals and pursue them with integrity. their own progress and reflect on their learning. Hold themselves and their peers accountable. Resolve conflicts using the agreed-upon studio systems. Embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Contribute to the studio tribe by supporting, inspiring, and leading others.

Remember: The hero's journey belongs to the learner, and no one else can walk it for them.

4.4 Working Together as a Tribe

The studio is not a hierarchy but a **tribe** built on shared respect, collaboration, and trust.

Every role matters. Every voice has value. Every promise is protected by all members of the community.

When guides, parents, and learners align around these roles, the magic of Acton — a place where heroes learn to change the world — truly comes alive.

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Section 5: Studio Systems & Culture

A healthy studio culture does not happen by accident — it is built, protected, and renewed every day through intentional systems. These systems empower learners to thrive in a community of respect, accountability, and growth.

5.1 Rules of Engagement

The *Rules of Engagement* are the behavioral agreements that form the backbone of the studio's culture. They answer: *How do we treat one another? How do we resolve conflict? How do we protect everyone's right to learn?*

Key elements: Studio contract co-created by the learners Clear rights and responsibilities Studio promises and values, posted visibly Levels of freedom tied to trust and responsibility

Why it matters: When learners build and uphold their own rules, they feel ownership of their community, making them far more motivated to honor and protect it.



5.2 Conflict Resolution Systems

Conflict is normal, even healthy, in a tribe. But it must be handled constructively. At Acton, conflict resolution is a skill to be learned, not avoided.

Key conflict resolution tools: Conflict Resolution process— learners post issues to discuss with peers **Running partners / accountability partners** — provide honest, kind feedback **Studio Town Hall** — a forum to address persistent issues collectively **Restorative conversations** — repairing harm instead of punishing mistakes

Why it matters: Learners who solve their own conflicts build empathy, leadership, and courage — essential skills for their Hero's Journey.

5.3 Town Meeting



The Town Meeting is a pillar of self-governance in a learner-driven studio.

Town Meeting features: Weekly or biweekly, led by learners Agenda set by the tribe, not the guide Proposals for changes to rules, schedules, or events Discussions of conflicts that could not be resolved individually Voting on studio-level decisions

Why it matters: Town Meetings create buy-in, empower collective decision-making, and remind heroes that they own their learning environment.

5.4 Exhibitions and Celebrations

Exhibitions replace traditional tests and grades with authentic, public accountability. They also celebrate progress and build a sense of accomplishment.

Key practices: Session-end public exhibitions to showcase projects and work Family and community audiences invited Heroes present their work with pride and ownership Reflection on what went well, what could improve, and what was learned Celebration of the Hero's Journey — acknowledging courage and effort

Why it matters: Exhibitions provide a "real world" audience and authentic stakes, motivating learners to do their best, while also celebrating their unique genius.



5.5 Studio Rituals and Norms

Rituals give rhythm and meaning to studio life. They reinforce culture and build a sense of belonging.

Possible studio rituals: Morning launches with a powerful question or story Closing circle to reflect on the day Weekly awards for courage, growth, or kindness Studio reset days to clean, reorganize, and recommit Sharing gratitude or appreciations regularly

Why it matters: Rituals strengthen relationships, build community identity, and keep the Hero's Journey alive.

5.6 Sustaining Studio Culture

A learner-driven studio is fragile. Over time, even small rule-breaking, disengagement, or negativity can break down the culture.

Protective practices for sustaining studio culture: Revisit the studio contract regularly Hold firm on consequences for broken agreements Celebrate successes and progress Address small conflicts before they grow Trust learners to solve problems, but support them if they get stuck

Remember: Studio systems and culture are the guardrails that protect the promises — they deserve constant attention and care.

Section 6: Learning Tools & Resources

At Acton Academy, heroes use a variety of tools and resources to fuel their curiosity, build skills, and take ownership of their learning. These tools support our promises by providing clear pathways to mastery and real-world application while encouraging exploration and creativity.

6.1 Digital Learning Platforms

We use carefully selected online platforms that allow heroes to learn at their own pace, receive immediate feedback, and practice mastery. These platforms cover core subjects such as math, reading, writing, and typing.

Examples include:

- **Khan Academy** — Self-paced math and science lessons with mastery tracking
- **Lexia Core5** — Adaptive literacy program that strengthens foundational reading skills
- **Typing Club** — Fun, interactive typing practice to build keyboarding fluency
- **Journey Tracker** — Our custom tool to help heroes set goals, track challenges, and celebrate progress

These platforms are accessible from home and studio, enabling learning anytime, anywhere.

6.2 Project-Based Learning Kits and Materials

Hands-on learning is at the heart of Acton. We provide various kits and materials to support project-based learning that connects knowledge to real-world creation.

Examples include:

- Art supplies for drawing, painting, sculpting, and crafting
- Science experiment kits to explore physical and natural sciences
- Culinary experiences for exploring cooking and nutrition

Heroes are encouraged to use these materials creatively, often combining multiple disciplines to solve complex problems.

6.3 Books and Research Resources

Curiosity-driven research is a core part of the hero's journey. The studio offers a well-stocked library with:

- Fiction and non-fiction books tailored to a wide range of interests and reading levels
- Reference materials including encyclopedias, atlases, and digital subscriptions
- Access to safe, age-appropriate online databases and websites for research

Heroes learn to develop good research habits, cite sources, and critically evaluate information.

6.4 Collaborative Tools and Spaces

Learning is a social adventure. Our studio includes:

- Collaborative workspaces with whiteboards, shared tables, and creative zones
- Digital collaboration tools for co-creating documents, presentations, and projects
- Quiet zones for focused individual work and reflection

These spaces and tools encourage heroes to learn from peers, share ideas, and lead discussions.

6.5 Reflection and Goal-Setting Tools

Self-awareness and ownership are key. We provide tools that help heroes set goals, reflect on progress, and adjust their paths. These include:

- **S.M.A.R.T. Goals Worksheets** — To define clear, measurable learning targets
- **Journals and Planners** — For daily or weekly reflections
- **Peer and Guide Feedback Forms** — Structured tools for giving and receiving constructive feedback

These resources help heroes build metacognitive skills essential for lifelong learning.

6.6 Parent and Guide Resources

Our learning tools extend to the adults supporting heroes. We provide:

- Guides and training on how to facilitate Socratic discussions and mastery learning
- Communication platforms for staying connected with the studio and tracking learner progress
- Resources for supporting learner independence at home without "rescuing"

This ecosystem creates a seamless support network between home and studio.

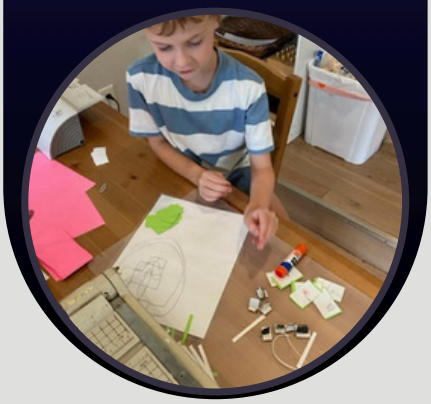
6.7 Customization and Exploration

Every hero is unique. We encourage learners to:

- Explore additional resources beyond the core tools (coding platforms, music apps, language tools, etc.)
- Customize their learning tools to fit their style (digital planners, creative notebooks, apps)
- Propose and pilot new resources as part of their Hero's Journey

Summary:

The tools and resources at Acton are designed to empower heroes to take charge of their learning — to explore, create, master, and reflect. They provide structure without stifling creativity and support independence without sacrificing connection.



Section 7: Maintaining the Promises



At Acton Academy, our promises—to begin a Hero's Journey, nurture curious and independent lifelong learners, foster respect for freedom, and cultivate appreciation for arts and the world—are the foundation of everything we do. Maintaining these promises requires clear measures of success and a strong culture of accountability within our learner community and the larger studio family.

7.1 How to Measure Success

Success at Acton is not about traditional grades or test scores; instead, it centers on growth, mastery, and character development aligned with our promises.

Key Indicators of Success:

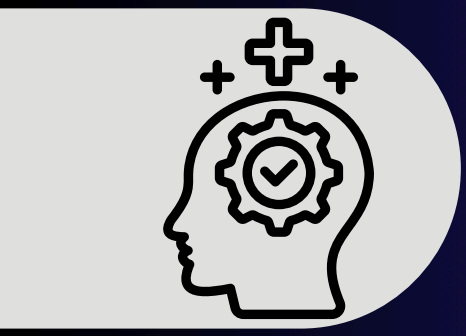
- **Mastery of Skills and Concepts:** Learners demonstrate mastery through projects, presentations, and assessments within platforms like Journey Tracker and Khan Academy. Progress is personalized and paced to ensure deep understanding.
- **Demonstrated Growth in Habits of Learning:** Success includes consistent practice of habits like goal-setting, reflection, perseverance, and collaboration. Reflections and journals provide evidence of metacognitive growth.
- **Community Engagement and Citizenship:** Heroes show respect for themselves and others, uphold studio contracts, and contribute positively to the community. Participation in Socratic discussions and leadership roles signals social-emotional success.
- **Real-World Impact:** Success is also measured by the learner's ability to connect their learning to meaningful actions, whether through creating, problem-solving, or service-oriented projects.

7.2 Keeping Learners Accountable

Accountability empowers heroes to take ownership of their journey while fostering independence, responsibility, and integrity.

Strategies to Keep Learners Accountable:

- **S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting:** Learners set clear, actionable goals each week and session. Goals are revisited regularly to assess progress and adjust plans as needed.
- **Daily and Weekly Check-Ins:** Structured check-ins with guides and accountability partners help learners reflect on progress, identify obstacles, and celebrate achievements.
- **Journey Tracker and Progress Logs:** Digital tools track learning targets, challenges, and milestones, providing transparent and ongoing feedback.
- **Peer Accountability:** Accountability partners and leadership roles foster peer encouragement and honest feedback, building a culture where learners support each other's success.
- **Consequences and Restorative Practices:** When learners struggle to meet commitments or uphold studio agreements, restorative conversations and problem-solving support personal growth rather than punishment.

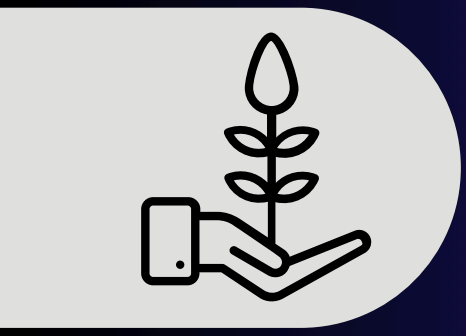


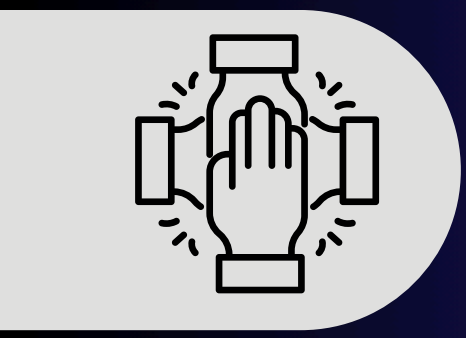
7.3 Holding the Community Accountable

The entire Acton community—learners, guides, families, and staff—shares responsibility for upholding the promises and culture.

Community Accountability Practices:

- **Studio Contract & Rules of Engagement:** A collaboratively created contract outlines the expectations for behavior, respect, and responsibility. Everyone commits to these agreements and revisits them regularly.
- **Socratic Discussions & Open Dialogues:** Community meetings and Socratic discussions provide space for collective reflection, airing concerns, and reinforcing shared values.
- **Family Partnership and Communication:** Transparent and ongoing communication with families helps align home and studio expectations. Families support learners in practicing accountability and living the promises.
- **Feedback Loops:** Regular surveys, forums, and suggestion systems enable the community to voice concerns, celebrate successes, and propose improvements.
- **Celebrations and Rituals:** Recognizing learners and community members who exemplify the promises fosters positive reinforcement and shared commitment.





Summary: Maintaining the Acton promises requires clear, transparent measures of success and a robust culture of accountability that empowers heroes to own their journey while creating a strong, supportive community. This balance ensures that the Acton experience remains trans formative, meaningful, and true to its mission.

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Section 8: Stories from the Studios



Stories bring the Acton experience to life, showing how our promises play out in real ways every day. These narratives of success, challenge, and learning help inspire heroes, guides, and families alike.

8.1 Success Stories

Acton studios around the world have countless examples of learners stepping into their power, overcoming obstacles, and making meaningful progress. These success stories illustrate how the Acton promises transform learners into courageous, independent heroes.

Sample Success Stories:

- **From Struggle to Mastery:** A learner who initially struggled with math concepts used Khan Academy to work at their own pace, setting S.M.A.R.T. goals and persevering. Over time, they went from frustration to mastery, culminating in a confident presentation of a complex project that applied their new skills.
- **Discovering a Passion:** Another hero who was unsure about their strengths tried different creation projects—from building bridges to writing comic books. Through exploration, they discovered a passion for storytelling and went on to write and illustrate a graphic novel that earned praise during the session exhibition.
- **Leadership Growth:** A shy learner gradually took on leadership roles like Tribe Leader and Conflict Mediator, learning to facilitate discussions and support peers. This growth boosted their confidence and communication skills, impacting the whole studio positively.
- **Real-World Impact:** Several heroes collaborated to design and build a community garden water wheel, applying engineering, teamwork, and project management skills. Their project improved the local community space and taught them the power of learning with purpose.

8.2 Challenges and Lessons Learned

Every hero's journey includes obstacles and setbacks, and Acton studios openly embrace these moments as powerful learning opportunities. Sharing challenges helps build resilience and creates a culture where failure is a stepping stone to success.

Common Challenges:

- **Maintaining Focus and Motivation:** Some learners initially struggle to maintain consistent progress with self-paced learning platforms or to balance their daily goals. Guides support these heroes with accountability partners, check-ins, and goal adjustments.
- **Balancing Freedom and Responsibility:** New heroes sometimes test boundaries in the quest for independence. Clear contracts, restorative conversations, and community accountability help recalibrate behavior while preserving trust.
- **Navigating Social Dynamics:** Peer conflicts and group dynamics are common challenges. Training in conflict resolution, mediation roles, and Socratic discussions equip learners to navigate relationships respectfully and maturely.
- **Managing Overwhelm:** The freedom to choose and design one's own learning path can be overwhelming. Guides teach time management and decision-making strategies to help learners prioritize and stay on track.

8.3 Lessons Learned by Guides and Studios

- **The Power of Reflection:** Regular reflection rituals with learners enhance self-awareness and guide continuous improvement in the studio culture.
- **Value of Community Input:** Involving families and learners in feedback loops strengthens commitment and helps studios evolve responsively.
- **Flexibility is Key:** Studios thrive when guides remain adaptable—balancing structure with learner autonomy and adjusting plans as needs change.
- **Celebrate Every Step:** Celebrating small wins boosts morale and reinforces a growth mindset throughout the studio.

8.4 Sharing Stories Across the Acton Network

- Studios share success stories and lessons learned through newsletters, social media, and conferences.
- Learners sometimes create podcasts, blogs, or videos to document their journeys and inspire others.
- This culture of storytelling builds connection and collective wisdom across the Acton community worldwide.

Section 9: Parent Engagement & Partnership

At Acton Academy, parents are essential partners in upholding our promises and nurturing the hero's journey. Their involvement, support, and collaboration help create a consistent environment where learners can thrive both in the studio and at home.

9.1 How Parents Support the Promises

Parents play a critical role in reinforcing Acton's three core promises:

- **Encouraging Hero's Journeys:** Parents motivate their learners to embrace challenges, set meaningful goals, and persist through setbacks. They celebrate effort and growth over perfection.
- **Fostering Curiosity and Independence:** At home, parents provide space and resources for exploration, ask open-ended questions, and encourage learners to take ownership of their learning process without rescuing or micromanaging.
- **Modeling Respect and Responsibility:** By upholding the studio's values and agreements, parents model respect for freedoms, community, and personal responsibility, reinforcing what learners experience in the studio.
- **Supporting Emotional Well-being:** Parents nurture social-emotional skills by listening empathetically, guiding conflict resolution, and encouraging healthy habits that support focus and balance.

9.2 Communication Rhythms

Effective, transparent communication between parents and guides is key to sustaining trust and alignment.

- **Weekly Updates:** Guides send weekly newsletters or emails outlining studio happenings, upcoming challenges, and celebrations.
- **Regular Check-Ins:** Scheduled meetings or quick calls provide opportunities to discuss learner progress, address concerns, and collaborate on strategies.
- **Digital Platforms:** Tools like Journey Tracker, class dojo, or custom portals allow parents to monitor learner goals, progress, and feedback in real time.
- **Family Events & Workshops:** Studios host exhibitions, Socratic discussion nights, and workshops where families can engage directly with the learning community.

9.3 Parent Agreements

To maintain a strong partnership, parents agree to commitments that align with the studio's culture and promises:

- **Support Learner Ownership:** Parents commit to encouraging their child's independence, allowing learners to take responsibility for their choices and learning.
- **Respect Studio Culture:** Parents agree to uphold the values and expectations outlined in the Studio Contract and support community agreements.
- **Engage Constructively:** Parents pledge to communicate respectfully and collaboratively with guides and other families, modeling the behavior expected of heroes.
- **Reinforce Accountability:** Parents support timely completion of assignments, attendance, and goal-setting while allowing natural consequences to encourage growth.
- **Participate in the Community:** Parents commit to attending exhibitions, meetings, and volunteer opportunities when possible, enriching the learning environment.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Parents respect the confidentiality of other learners and families, fostering a safe and trusting community.

9.4 Building a Partnership for Success

By partnering closely, parents and guides create a seamless learning ecosystem that bridges the studio and home environments. This partnership strengthens each hero's journey by providing consistent support, encouragement, and accountability.

9.5 Communication

Primary Communication Method

- Email is the most effective method of communication.
- Guides carry phones only for emergencies and are not available for calls or texts during the day.
- Emails with questions for a guide should be sent to the administrators at **amy@actonsalado.org**. When appropriate, these will be forwarded to the guide.
- For emergencies, call the school phone at **254-613-3269**.
- In the event of a school-wide emergency, families will receive a group text via **Class Dojo** with instructions.

Email Guidelines

1. Keep emails short and focused with a clear subject line.
   - Example: *"ATTN: Ms. Amy – Subject"*
2. Do not include negative, derogatory, or inflammatory statements.
3. Do not use email to debate or explain emotional or challenging topics.

If an email is inappropriate, the AAS Team member will send a standard response requesting an in-person or phone meeting:

"Thank you for your feedback. It is clear that this is a strong concern for you. As per our parent playbook, please schedule a meeting or phone call to discuss this type of feedback. Contact me at your earliest convenience to set up a follow-up phone conversation or a meeting. I am available at the following times..."



When to Contact a Guide

- Early pickup or absence
- Journey meetings or badge plan reviews
- Emergencies

⚠️ *To save time and maintain efficiency, please avoid asking guides questions at drop-off or pick-up. Guides remain in "guide mode" at all times while on campus.*

Summary: Parent engagement at Acton Academy is a collaborative, respectful partnership rooted in shared commitment to the promises and culture. Clear communication rhythms and mutual agreements help align efforts, ensuring heroes receive consistent guidance and support to become courageous, curious lifelong learners.



Section 10: FAQs & Troubleshooting



At Acton Academy, we understand that the learner-driven model is different from traditional schooling. It often raises questions and challenges for learners, families, and guides. This section addresses common concerns, clears up misunderstandings, and offers practical solutions to ensure a smooth, successful Hero's Journey.

10.1 Addressing Common Concerns

Q: How will my child learn everything they need without traditional grades and tests?

A: At Acton, mastery replaces grades. Learners work at their own pace to deeply understand concepts and demonstrate their skills through projects and presentations. This approach builds real competence and confidence, not just short-term test performance.

Q: What if my child struggles with motivation or time management?

A: Learner-driven models teach independence gradually. Guides and accountability partners support heroes with goal-setting, coaching, and daily check-ins. Parents and guides collaborate to help learners develop routines and self-discipline skills.

Q: How do you handle learners who fall behind?

A: Falling behind is part of the journey, not failure. Guides meet learners where they are, adjust goals, and provide targeted support. The mastery system allows learners to catch up and revisit skills as needed without pressure or stigma.

Q: What about socialization and teamwork?

A: Acton studios emphasize community through tribe roles, group projects, Socratic discussions, and leadership opportunities. Learners build strong social-emotional skills alongside academic growth.

Q: How do you keep learners accountable without traditional structures?

A: Accountability comes through clear agreements, S.M.A.R.T. goals, peer partnerships, and regular check-ins. Consequences focus on reflection and restoration rather than punishment.

10.2 Misunderstandings About Learner-Driven Models

- **Misunderstanding 1: "Learner-driven means no structure or discipline."**
- *Reality:* Learner-driven means learners have choice within a clear framework. Studio contracts, routines, and guides provide structure that supports freedom and responsibility simultaneously.
- **Misunderstanding 2: "Guides just let kids do whatever they want."**
- *Reality:* Guides actively coach, facilitate, and challenge learners. They use Socratic questioning, mastery tracking, and personalized feedback to guide growth without doing the work for the learners.
- **Misunderstanding 3: "Without grades, learners won't take learning seriously."**
- *Reality:* Intrinsic motivation grows when learners set meaningful goals and see the real-world impact of their work. The culture of accountability and public exhibitions also motivates learners to do their best.
- **Misunderstanding 4: "Parents can't support or help because they're not teachers."**
- *Reality*: Parents are vital partners. They support learner independence, encourage curiosity, and reinforce accountability at home. Guides provide parents with tools and communication to participate effectively.

10.3 Troubleshooting Tips

- **If your learner is overwhelmed:** Break goals into smaller steps and prioritize. Encourage reflection on what's working and adjust schedules accordingly.
- **If motivation dips:** Revisit the Hero's Journey promises. Help your learner connect daily work to long-term passions and purposes. Celebrate small wins frequently.
- **If conflicts arise in the studio:** Encourage use of conflict resolution tools, peer mediators, and guide support. Practice empathy and restorative conversations.
- **If technology is a barrier:** Contact guides or support staff promptly. Training and troubleshooting are available to ensure all heroes can access learning platforms.

10.4 Getting Help

- **Ask your Guide:** The first step in troubleshooting is an open conversation with your learner's guide.
- **Use Community Connections:** Join community events or meetings to share experiences and solutions.
- **Consult the Playbook:** Reference this playbook's tools, agreements, and resources for guidance.

Summary

The learner-driven model is a journey filled with discovery and growth—sometimes challenging, always rewarding. By addressing common concerns, clearing up misunderstandings, and applying practical strategies, families and guides can confidently support every hero to thrive.

Acton Academy Salado

11.6: Accountability and Honor Code

At Acton Academy Salado, we believe that freedom must be paired with responsibility. Our learners are given extraordinary independence to pursue their Hero's Journeys, set goals, and make choices that matter. With that freedom comes the responsibility to live within the agreements of the community and to treat others with respect, kindness, and honesty. We are an intentionally diverse and inclusive learning community. Acton Academy Salado values, respects, and benefits from the unique identity of each hero and community member—regardless of age, ability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. Every member of our community is expected to embrace and foster this inclusiveness so that all heroes feel safe, respected, and supported on their Hero's Journey.



The Honor Code is our shared commitment to integrity, accountability, and respect. Most accountability happens naturally through peer feedback, Hero Bucks, and the Studio Contract. However,when behavior requires adult intervention, guides use the Honor Code system as a framework to help heroes learn from mistakes, take ownership of their choices, and restore trust within the community.

Our goal is not punishment, but growth. Each step in this process is designed to:

- Encourage reflection and personal responsibility.
- Protect the health and safety of the community.
- Offer clear opportunities for redemption and restoration.
- Remind each hero that mistakes are part of learning and can lead to stronger character.



In this way, the Honor Code system supports our promises to help every hero:

- Begin a Hero's Journey.
- Learn to be curious, independent, and lifelong learners.
- Develop deep respect for freedom and responsibility.
- Cherish the arts, nature, and wonders of the world.
- Discover their calling and use it to make a difference.

— because the promises are the foundation of everything we do.

Honor Code Accountability Process

Most accountability happens through peer feedback and the Studio Contract.

When a guide must step in, the process follows these steps:

- Strike 1 – First Warning & Reflection
- Hero is removed from group until they choose to rejoin responsibly.
- Parents are notified by email.
- Strike Form + Behavioral Check-in sent home (must be signed and returned before next school day).
- Guide meets with hero to connect the strike to the **Studio Contract of Promises**.
- Hero brainstorms strategies to prevent another strike.

Consequence: Hero sits out of group activities (Quest, Socratic, etc.) for the remainder of the day. May still attend Exhibition.

- **Strike 2 – Removal & Reset Plan**
- All Strike 1 steps apply.
- Hero is sent home.
- When returning, hero must share **2–3 strategies** with peers at Launch for making better choices.
- If unprepared/unwilling → hero remains home under a **Probationary Contract**.
- Parents, guide, Head of School, and hero attend a **mandatory Honor Code Violation Conference**.
- Studio celebrates hero's return as part of learning from mistakes.
- Honor Code Violation (HCV) Conference
- Held when an HCV is issued.
- Parents, guide, Head of School, and hero create a **Behavior Plan** (may include apology, community service, restricted freedoms, or give-backs).



- Success = no further action.
- Failure to comply = hero is choosing to leave the community (Head of School discretion).
- Reset & Exit Guidelines
- Strikes and HCVs reset at the beginning of each new academic year.
- Two HCVs in one year generally = choosing to leave the community.
- Extreme or dangerous behavior = possible immediate removal (not automatic expulsion; case-by-case).



Probationary and Transition Contracts

- Probationary Contract

A **Probationary Contract** may be used when ongoing behaviors threaten the health of the studio culture.

- The contract outlines **strict expectations** and a timeline (typically 1–6 months).
- Heroes must demonstrate measurable improvement to remain in the studio.
- Failure to meet expectations results in removal from the studio.
- The owners reserve the right to dismiss a hero immediately for behavior that is dangerous or severely damaging.



- Transition Contract

A **Transition Contract** is sometimes used when a hero is preparing to move to another school or when their actions are undermining the values of the studio, even if they are technically following the Studio Contracts.

Transition Contracts are particularly helpful for "agreeable takers"—heroes who act outwardly polite but damage culture through hidden or passive-aggressive behaviors. These contracts:

- Establish **clearer guardrails** and more immediate consequences.
- Ensure accountability while supporting the community's health.
- Provide structure and clarity during the transition process.



- Probationary / Exit Contracts
- A hero may first receive a **Probationary Contract** if they are not living up to their commitments and promises.
- The contract specifies **measurable results** that must be achieved in order to continue at Acton.
- If the probationary contract is not upheld, the hero will move to an **Exit Contract**, signaling the final step of their journey at Acton Academy.



Guide Process for Upholding Guardrails

Guides partner with heroes and hero-leaders to uphold guardrails and protect studio culture. The process often includes:

1. **Mirror & Challenge** – A guide may hold up a "mirror" to a hero-leader, challenging them to assess the situation and take a stand for their peers and the studio.
2. **Accountability Strategies** – Heroes may be reminded of community tools for addressing distractions or breaches. A hero-leader may choose from this list (or propose their own strategies):
    - Deduct a Hero Buck (with follow-up reflection on the impact).
    - Ask the distracted hero to remove themselves from the studio or complete silent Core Skills independently.
    - Pause all studio activities to hold an emergency meeting and "declare the impact."
    - Invite another hero or group of leaders to help resolve the issue.
    - Ask the distracted hero to share a plan with the studio for being more intentional.
    - Request that the hero send a written recommitment email to the studio (with parents and guide CC'd).
    - Ask the hero to go home for the day to reset.
    - Propose a new strategy to address the situation.
- **Reflection & Check-In** – Afterward, the hero-leader shares lessons learned with the guide and a peer. The guide may encourage the hero-leader to initiate a **Behavioral Check-in** with their peer to ensure accountability and restoration.

11.4 Additional Resources

What to Bring

To help your hero be prepared for a successful day at Acton Academy, please ensure they bring the following items:

- **Book for DEAR (Drop Everything and Read):** Heroes may bring a book of their choice. A small school library is also available.
- **Computer/Chromebook:** Any device with cloud-based capability is acceptable.
    - *Note:* Please review the **Electronics** section for details about in-studio use and parent responsibilities for online safety.
- **Headphones:** Please label these clearly. A computer mouse may also be brought if desired.
- **Healthy lunch and snacks.**
- **Water bottle:** We provide drinkable well water, and bottles may be refilled throughout the day. If your hero prefers not to drink well water, please send enough water to last the day. *Cups are not provided.*

School Supplies

Acton Academy families pay a **registration fee** prior to the start of the school year. This fee covers basic studio setup, access to online curriculum, and general supply needs such as (but not limited to):

- Quest materials
- Printing paper
- Pencils, pens, and notebooks
- Craft supplies
- Hero Buck Store inventory

Because these essentials are provided through the registration fee, families are not required to purchase additional classroom supplies.

NEW

Late Arrival & On-Time Arrival Policy

Our Commitment

At Acton Academy Salado, we believe that keeping promises and taking responsibility are essential parts of becoming an independent Hero.

Our school day begins with Morning Launch at 8:30 AM. Arriving on time allows every learner to begin the day prepared, participate fully in Launch, and respect the learning community.

Arrival Time & Pick-Up

- Drop-off is from 7:50 AM–8:30 AM.
- Learners are ready for the school day by 8:30 AM.
- Pick-up is from 2:45–3:15 PM.

Late Arrival & Pick-Up

After 8:30 AM arrival or 3:15 PM pick-up, families choose one of the options below:



Option 1: $10 Late Arrival Fee

The family may pay a $10 late arrival fee for each occurrence.



Option 2: One Hour of Community Service

The family may complete one hour of community service to support Acton Academy Salado in place of the $10 fee. Community service may include helping with campus organization, maintenance, preparation, or another appropriate task identified by the school.

Why We Do This

This policy is not intended to punish families. It is designed to create a natural consequence that reinforces one of our core promises:
Keep my promises and take responsibility.
Being on time is a promise we make to ourselves, our fellow Heroes, our Guides, and our community.
Repeated late arrivals may result in a conversation with the family to identify barriers and create a plan for consistent, on-time arrival.

Exceptions

The school recognizes that genuine emergencies and circumstances outside a family's control may occur. Families should communicate with the school as soon as reasonably possible when an exceptional circumstance prevents on-time arrival. Acton Academy Salado reserves the right to determine whether a circumstance qualifies for an exception.

Acton Academy Salado

NEW

Sick Child & Illness Policy



2026

Our Commitment

Acton Academy Salado is committed to maintaining a healthy learning environment where learners can participate fully and where families, learners, and Guides take responsibility for the well-being of the entire community.

When a learner is sick, staying home is an act of responsibility toward both the learner and the community.

When a Learner Should Stay Home

A learner should remain home when they are too ill to comfortably participate in the normal school day or when they may reasonably expose others to illness.

Families should keep a learner home when the learner has symptoms such as:

- Fever or elevated temperature
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Significant or persistent coughing
- Difficulty breathing
- Unexplained or contagious rash
- Significant sore throat or other symptoms that prevent normal participation
- Any contagious illness for which the learner has not met the recommended return-to-school schedule
- Any illness where the learner requires more care than the school can reasonably provide during the day

Fever, Vomiting & Diarrhea

A learner who has a fever, vomiting, or diarrhea should remain home until they have recovered sufficiently to participate normally in the school day and meet the school's applicable return-to-school requirements.
Families should follow medical guidance when a learner has been diagnosed with a contagious illness.

If a Learner Becomes Sick at School

If a learner becomes ill during the school day:

- The learner will be separated from the active learning environment as appropriate.
- A parent/guardian will be contacted.
- The learner must be picked up within a reasonable period of time.
- Families should make arrangements for an emergency contact to assist with pickup if they are unavailable.

Medication

Medication may only be administered at school in accordance with Acton Academy Salado's medication procedures and required parent/guardian authorization.

Learners should not bring medication to school unless arrangements have been made with the school.

Communicating an Absence

Families should notify Acton Academy Salado as soon as possible when their learner will be absent because of illness.

Families are encouraged to communicate the nature of a contagious illness when appropriate so the school can take reasonable steps to protect the community.

Responsibility to the Community

We ask families to make thoughtful decisions about attendance. Sending a learner to school when they are clearly sick may negatively affect the learner's recovery and expose other learners, Guides, and families. At Acton, we ask:

"What is the courageous and responsible choice for myself and my community?"

Acton Academy Salado

Field Trip & Salado ISD Transportation Policy



NEW 2026

Our Commitment

Field trips are an important part of the Acton experience. They allow Heroes to take learning into the real world, practice independence, and develop courage and responsibility.

When transportation is provided through Salado Independent School District (Salado ISD), learners and families are expected to follow both Acton Academy Salado expectations and all applicable Salado ISD transportation rules.

Field Trip Permission

A learner may participate in a field trip only when the required permission forms have been completed by the parent/guardian.

Families are responsible for reviewing:

- Field trip details
- Departure and return times
- Required clothing or equipment
- Fees and other requirements
- Any additional costs
- Transportation arrangements
- Emergency contact information

Bus Departure

When a field trip requires transportation by a Salado ISD school bus, learners must arrive at school before the designated departure time.
The bus will depart at the scheduled time.
Families are responsible for ensuring that their learner arrives on time and is prepared for the field trip.
Being on time for a field trip is part of keeping a promise to the community.
If a learner misses the bus, the family is responsible for contacting the school immediately.
If a learner misses the bus, the learner may not be able to participate in the field trip.

Being on time for a field trip is part of keeping a promise to the community.

Upper Level Transportation (Guides, Parent Volunteers & Car Travel)

For Upper Level learners, some field trips may use different transportation options beyond the school bus. In these cases:
Upper Level learners may travel in cars driven by Guides and/or parent volunteers.
The school will notify families when car travel is being used.
All drivers will be expected to follow appropriate safety and security protocols and school guidelines.
Seatbelts must be worn at all times.
Learners are expected to behave respectfully and responsibly in all vehicles, just as they would on the bus.

Bus Expectations

While riding a Salado ISD bus, learners are expected to:

- Follow all directions from the bus driver and supervising Guides.
- Remain seated at direct.
- Keep hands, feet, and objects to themselves.
- Use respectful language and behavior.
- Keep the bus clean.
- Remain appropriately quiet so the driver can safely operate the vehicle.
- Follow all Salado ISD transportation rules.

The bus is considered part of the learning environment. Acton Academy expectations for respectful and responsible behavior remain in effect throughout transportation.

Safety Comes First

The bus driver's directions must be followed immediately. Guides and learners may not interfere with the driver's ability to safely operate the bus.

Any behavior that creates a safety concern may result in the learner being removed from the activity and/or additional consequences in accordance with Acton Academy Salado and Salado ISD policies.

Parent/Guardian Pickup after a Field Trip

Families should be aware of the scheduled return time and make arrangements for timely pickup.

If a field trip is delayed because of traffic, weather, or another circumstance, the school will communicate updated information when possible.

Learner Responsibility

Field trips are an opportunity for learners to practice:

Independence
Courage
Responsibility
Respect
Keeping promises

Our goal is not simply to take learners somewhere new. Our goal is to give them the opportunity to act like responsible heroes in the real world.

Campus Safety & Emergency Preparedness



2026

The safety of our learners and community is a priority at Acton Academy Salado.

Acton maintains a comprehensive campus safety and emergency preparedneses program. Guides receive training in emergency procedures, and the School maintains protocols for situations including severe weather, fire, evacuation, lockdown, medical emergencies, reunification, and other potential threats.

Our campus safety program may include specifically trained and individually authorized personnel as permitted by Texas law and School policy.

For security reasons, Acton does not publicly disclose the identities, locations, assignments, or specific response procedures of safety personnel.

During an emergency, families should rely on official communication from Acton and follow the reunification or pickup instructions provided by the School. Families should not enter or approach the campus during an active emergency unless instructed to do so by School personnel or law enforcement.

NEW

STUDIO DRESS CODE

The purpose of the Acton Academy Salado dress code is to promote a safe, respectful learning environment, minimize distractions, teach appropriate grooming and hygiene, and encourage studio pride.

PANTS • SHORTS • SKIRTS • DRESSES

ALLOWED

- Jeans
- Khakis
- Dress pants
- Capris
- Loose-fitting athletic pants/joggers
- Shorts
- Dresses, skirts, and skorts



NOT ALLOWED

- Leggings (must be worn with shirt to cover hip and buttocks at all times)
- Compression shorts
- Clothing that sags below the hips



SHIRTS & TOPS

ALLOWED

- T-shirts
- Blouses with T-shirt coverage
- Collared shirts
- Jackets
- Hoodies
- Hats



NOT ALLOWED

- Crop tops
- Low cut shirts
- Tank tops
- Open back shirts



LENGTH & FIT

NOT ALLOWED

- Shorts, skirts, dresses, and skorts must be at least mid-thigh in length.
- Holes or slits in garments must be located below mid-thigh.
- Pants, jeans, and shorts must be worn at the waist, i.e. no sagging.
- No dips or holes above mid-thigh.
- No tank tops with spaghetti straps, thick straps covering under garments are permitted.

Wear offensive or distracting accessories.

GROOMING & APPEARANCE

Students may not:

NEW

Parent Commitments

Enrollment Commitment & Tuition Responsibility

A Full-Year Commitment

Choosing Acton Academy Salado is a commitment to the entire academic year.

When a family enrolls a learner at Acton Academy Salado, they are reserve a place in our community for the full 2026–2027 academic year, from September 8, 2026 through June 18, 2027.

Our studios are intentionally designed around stable communities. Every learner who joins becomes part of the experience, culture, and journey of the entire studio.

Because of this, enrollment is not intended to be a month-to-month commitment.

By enrolling, Parents/Guardians agree to be financially responsible for the full annual tuition, regardless of whether a learner attends for the entire year.

Tuition & Payment Responsibility

Families may choose the payment plan associated with their program:



Full-Time Program:
$9,295 annually — 11 monthly payments of $845



Hybrid Program:
$5,775 annually — 11 monthly payments of $525

Monthly tuition payments are due no later than the 26th of each month.

UPDATED



Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to read through the Acton Academy Salado Family Handbook. This guide is meant to serve as a compass for our shared journey—helping us stay true to our promises and supporting every hero along the way.

We are grateful for your partnership, your trust, and your commitment to this learner-driven adventure. Together, we are building a community where every child can discover their calling and change the world.

With gratitude,
The Acton Academy Salado Team

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