

Homeroom Parent Handbook



2015-2016

GWA Mission Statement

GEMS World Academy-Dubai develops inquiring, reflective and caring learners who, through the rigour of the IB programs, have the knowledge, skills and character to take action and create a better, more peaceful world. Supported by highly qualified staff in world-class facilities, our diverse international community is encouraged to develop intercultural understanding and respect.

الرسالة:

تُمنى أكاديمية جيمز العالمية بدبي المتعلمين الباحثين و المهتمين - من خلال برنامج البكالوريا الدولية - الذين يمتلكون السمات الشخصية و المعرفة و المهارات لاتخاذ الإجراءات لصنع عالم أفضل و ذلك من خلال فريق عمل مؤهل في بيئة تعليمية مناسبة . و يحفز التنوع الموجود في مؤسستنا العالمية تطوير فهم الثقافات العالمية واحترامها

Introduction

Congratulations! You have volunteered to be a GWA Homeroom Parent. By volunteering for this role, you are now in a position to positively impact the educational experience of your child and their classmates. The success of GWA lies largely with the dedication of volunteers in and around the school. This handbook will provide you with some guidelines and suggestions that will help make your experience as a Homeroom Parent effective and rewarding. Please know that you are VERY appreciated!

Purpose

The purpose of the Homeroom Parent is to be:

- 1) a communication channel between the teacher and the other class parents. Under direction from the teacher, the Homeroom Parent organizes and coordinates the resources of the class parents. These resources include:
 - a) Parent Volunteer time in the classroom (reading workshop, centers, fieldtrip assistance, etc.)
 - b) Parent Volunteer time for event/party planning
 - c) Parent Volunteer and purchase of treats for special occasions.
 - d) Classroom funds
- 2) the classroom delegate to GWAPA where you serve as the key communication ambassador for your classroom families.
- 3) Overseer and Manager of the classroom funds used to supply events for the class.

Communication

Communication is a big part of the Homeroom Parent role. As a matter of fact, **your role is KEY in increasing volunteer participation for school/class events.**

You will be communicating with the teacher, the class parents, GWAPA and other Homeroom Parents depending on the event. In addition to what is going on in the classroom, weekly reminders will send out about important things going on around school via the Dragon Tale Newsletters.

Keep it light. There is no better recipe for success than humor. You will be able to get more parent participation and teacher cooperation this way.

Teacher

The Homeroom Parent works closely with the teacher. This assistance to the teacher allows the educational process to flow smoothly and allows added enrichment components in the classroom.

Each teacher has a unique communication style. Some teachers prefer to communicate via email and other teachers prefer face-to-face meetings before or after class. Talk to your teacher early in the school year and determine the communication approach that works best for both of you.

Also, remember that it is the teacher that establishes what is required of you. Every teacher has a different style of managing their class and might already have a plan for what is required from volunteers (i.e. workshops/fieldtrips/read-aloud). Also, depending on class schedules, they will have a better idea on the best time of day to host events/parties, what to include in decorations, what to include in party foods, etc. Remember, although you are there to help, you also do not wish to disrupt classroom academics.

The Class Parents

Your teacher will be the first communicator with your class parents. You will assist the teacher with communicating events and activities to the parents.

Volunteers, volunteers, volunteers!! Your class parents will be more than happy to help you in any way. Plan ahead of events and parties and make sure you ASK for HELP! Use all channels of communication or the best one that allows for higher parent participation. You will find email and texts are effective ways of communicating with class parents, but you may also post messages and sign-up sheets on the classroom doors. Drop off and pick up are also key times to reach parents and gain some extra help.

The Class Funds

How much?

The different events of the class will require you to spend on gifts and supplies. You will need to request from your classroom parents an amount between 150 and 200 Dirhams. Keep in mind that donating to the class fund is **NOT OBLIGATORY, it is voluntary**. Please make sure you mention this when approaching parents and no pressure can be placed on parents that do not participate. However, ALL children will take part in ALL events regardless of whether funds were submitted or not. You will request donations from the parents at the beginning of the year and plan well so that whatever funds you have collected last throughout the year. Requests for funds later in the year are not encouraged, so please budget wisely.

What will you spend funds on?

- Class gifts for teacher & Teacher Assistant
- Classroom party supplies/decorations
- Appreciation gifts for Specials teachers

What if you have not been able to collect enough funds?

Firstly, advise the parents and the teacher how much of the funds you have been able to collect so expectations can be managed. Perhaps the teacher can make some suggestions. If you do not have sufficient funds to purchase birthday gifts, one suggestion is to send a message to parents that the teacher's or TA's birthday is upcoming and that donations are being collected for the gift as insufficient funds have been received during class fund collections. You can add to that message: *"For those who have already provided to the class fund, there is no need to provide additional money as this would already be covered under your contribution. Thank you."*

When to ask for funds?

Many Homeroom Parents have found it works well to ask for the contribution at the same time you ask parents to submit and approve their contact details for the class list. Provide an envelope with your letter/form and ask them to send it to you via their child's folder that they turn into the classroom teacher or bring to the first coffee morning.

Experience shows that as time goes on, it is increasingly more difficult to ask for money and get contributions, so send reminders early on. Some forget whether they have contributed to your class or another, so keep records.

Records!

We cannot stress this enough the importance of keeping records and receipts of what you have been able to collect and what you have spent. You must be prepared to show this to any contributing class parent at any time. For accountability, you could designate another parent to serve as treasurer, someone who would be happy to be involved in the gift buying with you.

Any planned expenses should be presented and agreed on by the participants at parent meetings. It may be in your culture to give generously, but remember you have a budget and need to spread it out! Try to avoid putting yourself in the delicate position of having to ask for more money at the end of the year.

Once you have collected your funds, it is recommended you share this information with the teacher and the class parents so that expectations can be managed as to what can and cannot be accomplished in the year.

Getting Started – First things first

- Set a meeting with your teacher before you meet with parents so needs can be established for his/her class. Please refer to section "Tips on what to discuss in your first teacher/HRP meeting".
- Request the following information from the teacher:
 - His/her birthday date
 - TA's birthday date

- Names of Specials Teachers that will be working with that class
- Set meeting (place & time) for your first parent coffee/informational morning (the Coffee Shop in the Reception area at 8:30 ensures the best attendance for the first meeting!)
- Decide the contribution amount for class fund. Keep in the 150 – 200 Dirhams range per child.
- Via student folders or via email, send a letter out to your parents explaining your role, requesting contact details, encouraging a contribution to a class fund, and inviting them to your first meeting (see “Sample Intro Letter”). Attach an envelope if possible.
- Compile a class contact list, by permission of each family, and distribute (you could have parents check their details at the first meeting)
- Always ‘blind copy’. When sending a group email, place addresses in the blind copy (bcc)
- Feel free to meet with other Homeroom Parents from your grade to discuss coordinating decorations or events (optional!)
- Don’t get discouraged if only half (or fewer) of the parents attend your coffee mornings. Remember to take into account working parents, those with language barriers or young children, and simple scheduling conflicts. You will most likely have one small core group of people who try to show up for most meetings.
- Try to set a positive tone from the beginning. You have the potential to brighten the teacher’s year and promote friendships among the parents. Aim to avoid negative gossip (especially as the source of it!), but rather use proper channels if problems arise (Parent Relations Executive or a member of the Leadership Team).

Gifts

A good portion of the funds of the class will go into the purchase of gifts for Teachers, Teaching Assistants and Specialist Teachers. Plan ahead based on your budget. We suggest you buy these ahead of time so you are able to allocate the remaining funds best.

Birthdays, Teacher Appreciation Day and End-of-School

Most parents enjoy recognizing the birthday of their child’s teacher and teaching assistant. The children love to do something special for them, too! Find out your teacher’s and teaching assistant’s birthdays during your first meeting. Don’t feel shy asking them their likes. You can also listen and observe for clues as to what they enjoy, or casually ask them or a close colleague. If you feel you do not know what to give, do not worry, I think most will be very happy to receive a Gift Certificate. It allows teachers to purchase something of their liking. You can have a nice card made and signed by the students. That is always a nice added touch.

Purchase approved gift(s) and invite parents for the presentation. Fifteen minutes before pick-up tends to work best.

End of Year – If funds are running low, and even if they are not, a handmade gift by the students like a memory book, or an item with their drawings, photos or signatures is often most appreciated by teachers!

What is customary in terms of value of gifts for teachers and when?

From all the suggested times (birthdays, Eid, Christmas, Teacher Appreciation Day and End of year) where teacher gifts can be given out, the most important dates are birthdays and Teacher Appreciation day (as a general rule of thumb). However, if you feel you need to deviate from this suggestion based on available funds (maybe not enough, or maybe more?) or different suggestions by parents, then go for it.

As for value of gifts, this is also a very subjective question and very dependent on the available class funds collected and the suggestions made by other class parents. One strong recommendation is to look at the funds you have available and budget for these at the very beginning, even perhaps purchasing the gift beforehand. If you need a rough estimate, it would be suggested to leave at least half of your budget aside for birthdays and Teacher Appreciation gifts for the teacher and teaching assistant and the rest of the funds for the remaining expenses (i.e. specialist teacher gifts, goody bags for the children, materials for crafts, etc.)

Teacher Appreciation

The official Teacher Appreciation Luncheon is just once a year in June. Feel free to appreciate your teachers ANY time throughout the year and don't overlook the Specialist Teachers (PE, Swimming, Arabic, Music, Strings, ICT, Art, and Librarian) and the Nurse's office! They teach and take care of your child in very important ways all year. Some ideas might include: a card from the class with movie/ice cream vouchers; home-baked cake/cupcakes or bag of treats; pampering product; home accessory; vouchers to favorite cafe/restaurant, specialty store or for adventure; locally made products such as camel milk chocolates, Arabian-style picture frame with photo, or hand-made jewelry. Be creative!

Party Planning

Another key role as Homeroom Parent is to be a party/event planner, especially in the earlier years. You may already be an expert in party planning so please offer your advice to those who are new to the role as a Homeroom Parent. Parties need not be extravagant and should definitely not be disruptive. Food is usually the easiest donation to get from parents. The teacher may already provide you with a list of foods that have worked well in the past. He/she might also already send out this list to the parents asking for donations. If this is not the case then make a list of food items for parents to donate. Make the list very explicit so that no food is wasted and try to stick to the healthy side avoiding too many sweets. We also recommend including finger foods only as it can messy

Check with teacher first

Remember to check with your teacher on the following first:

- The dates and occasions of the parties for your classroom.
- How much time and what part of the day will be allocated for each party?
- Does the teacher want the parents to run the entire party, or will she be organizing some of the activities?
- Does the teacher expect a craft at every party?
- Does the teacher expect the room parents to organize a game at each party?
- Is he/she OK if goody bags are given out, or does he/she prefer to place in cubbies for end of school day?
- What kind of food does the teacher want served - parents' choice? All healthy? Minimal mess? No cupcakes?
- Are there any **allergies** in the classroom? If yes, how can you accommodate their needs? You might need to organize with the child's parent.

Once you have these answers you are ready to plan the event. Plan for food & supplies, decorations, gifts (birthday or goody bags), crafts, games and communicating...

The Party – before & after

The schedule of your event should look something like this:

2 weeks before the party:

- Meet with the teacher to discuss date/time of party, what to include (games/crafts, etc.)
- Send email to parents informing them of the upcoming event and requesting for volunteers

In the days running up to the date:

- Send a kind reminder to the parents and volunteers
- Provide clear instructions to volunteers of what you need them to do

The DAY of the party:

- Organize so that you have volunteers help you set up food, crafts, games and decorate
- Organize volunteers to guide the crafts & games
- Organize the volunteers to help you clean up afterwards

Leading the party – Check with you teacher to see if he/she wishes to lead the games and explain them to the children. It always helps to have the teacher keep order with the children & surprisingly sometimes even the parents.

SAMPLE of Email sent to parents: *(You will need to adjust this message)*

Dear Moms and Dads of (class name),

There are a few updates coming your way in this email along with the updated class list.

We have received (amount collected) so far from parents, thank you! We still look forward to complete the (contribution goal) in funds for the class we had hoped to collect. If you have not yet contributed and you wish to do so, please send funds in an envelope and give to (designated person). Your support over the past few weeks has been invaluable. (Teacher's name), (TA's name), and the children are very thankful.

(Name of event): As confirmed by (Teacher's name), the (name of event) will begin at (time) on (date). All parents are invited to come and enjoy some fun and games. We are asking for volunteers for the following:

(Insert details needed here)

We look forward to seeing all parents that day!! Don't forget your camera!

All the best,

Your name & number

(Class name) Homeroom Parent

Crafts

If it has been decided that you need to organize a craft for a party, there are several important things to remember:

- keep the craft simple and manageable within the time frame;
- keep the craft age appropriate;
- if the craft will be transported home that day, remember to take into account the drying time required for paint or glue projects

In most cases, especially for the younger grades, it's helpful to have all of the **supplies organized prior to the party**. That means having all of the **pieces pre-cut** and creating a **bag of craft components for each child**. This is not so much for the benefit of the child as it is for the benefit of the room parents! Otherwise you will find yourself running around during the party as you divide the supplies and making sure that everyone has what they need. Cutting skills are variable at all ages, and if you give the children too many things to cut, their completion times will vary greatly. Naturally, whenever possible, choose a craft that is theme appropriate. Your classroom teacher may be able to provide a few age-appropriate suggestions.

Games

At most classroom parties, you should plan games or activities so that the children can work off a little bit of energy. If the weather is nice, it may be possible to plan games for outside such as

relay races. But there are plenty of fun games you can play in the classroom as well. The teacher may be able to provide a few age-appropriate suggestions.

Decorating the Room

You will be decorating the classroom for the different school theme events /parties as agreed to by the classroom teacher. Find out from your classroom teacher what parties they want you to plan. Some teachers have restrictions on where these decorations should be, so please check before decorating. Please be culturally sensitive when planning for decorations. We stress the need to be sensitive to our country host's cultural celebrations into your decoration planning.

Parent Coffee Mornings

Communicating with parents can be done through Email, phone or WhatsApp. It is a great way to create community. It would be a nice idea to organize at least two coffee mornings during the year. Once at the beginning of the school year and once after the winter break. The purpose of these is to foster a sense of community in the class and to encourage participation and engagement in the classroom.

SAMPLE Homeroom Parent Introduction Letter to Class Parents

Dear Parents of (class),

Hello! My name is _____ and I am happy to be the Homeroom Parent for our class this year. In this role, I will be involved in helping (teacher's name) plan classroom celebrations and events, coordinating parent volunteers and informing you of school or grade-wide happenings. I will also be planning social get-togethers for the children and coffee mornings for parents to get to know one another better. For questions specific to your child, please in touch directly you're your child's classroom teacher and/or a member of the elementary leadership team.

Firstly, I would like to put together a class list with contact information of the children in (class name). The class list is a useful tool for parents for keeping in touch, arranging play dates, homework questions and planning class events. It should be used only for (class) class purposes, please.

I would also like to start a (class) fund which would cover teacher/T.A. gifts and possible supplies for class parties throughout the whole year. The suggested amount is AED 150-200. Contributions are voluntary, but very helpful in allowing the class to appreciate the teacher and enhance celebrations.

Please fill out the information you would like to be included on the class list below, put the slip in an envelope marked with your son/daughter's name and enclose your class fund contribution. Send the sealed envelope to school with your child to give to (Teacher's name).

Finally, please mark (date) on your calendar for our first parent coffee/informational meeting to take place at (time) at (location). Hope to see you there!

I look forward to meeting you all and to a wonderful year in (class)! Please feel free to contact me at (email address) if you have any questions.

(Sincerely/ Best regards/Warm regards, etc.)

(Your name), mother of (Child's name)

(Phone number)

Child's Name: First _____ Family name _____

Mother's Name: _____ Father's Name: _____

Mother's Mobile #: _____ Father's Mobile #: _____

Mother's Email: _____ Father's Email: _____

Neighborhood: _____ (example, Arabian Ranches, Springs, Barsha, etc.)

_____ I give permission for you to include the above information on a (class) list

_____ My class fund contribution is included

Thank You!

GEMS World Academy realizes the value of volunteers in the school. Homeroom Parents are an integral part of the educational success we are striving for here at our school. As a primary support for the classroom teacher, Homeroom Parents provide a highly beneficial and worthwhile service. Best wishes for a very successful school year.

***Adapted from the GEMS DAA publication written by Marisa.*