

*Germantown Elementary Q & A

During the first few days of the school year parents will be receiving a lot of paperwork. Why is it important to read it (and send some papers back filled out) in a timely manner?

All this paperwork is very important. The Student Emergency Information Sheet (yellow) gives us vital information on who to contact during an emergency or medical emergency concerning your child. The Student Emergency Plan (pink) gives us permission to release your child to a certain person during an emergency. Your child will not be released to anyone unless you have given that permission. The Insurance information should be considered if your child does not have insurance. The Application for Free or Reduced Meals should be returned as soon as possible as this process can take 2 – 3 weeks to be approved. -- Mrs. Spurgeon, GES attendance secretary

My family is new to the area and doesn't really know many people. What is the best way for us, as parents, to interact with other families and how can I find 'nice' friends for my children?

Join the PTA and volunteer in their class. All the grade levels are small and to it is easy to get to know the kids. There is the Back to School Picnic and Back to School Night to get to know the other parents. Encourage your children to join one of the after school clubs. Also, parents are allowed to eat lunch with their kids occasionally. It is a good way to see the other kids in action. Finally, volunteering on field trips allows a lot of time to get to know the kids in the class and sometimes other classes.--Mrs. Schrantz, mother of kindergartener, 3rd and 5th grader

I am worried about my child purchasing lunch and the lunchroom procedures. What is the process for helping (especially) young students during lunchtime?

At lunchtime, the teacher will take the class to the lunchroom. Students that have brought lunch from home will go directly to their assigned table and the others who have ordered lunch will stand in line. For the first week, the teacher, or a volunteer (parents are encouraged to volunteer), will help the students choose the correct items, put them on their tray, and type in their personal pin numbers (4 digit code). The student will have a note with their pin number (from the teacher) so that they know what to type in. During this first week, teachers of the lower grades will be practicing typing in the pin numbers in class using a copy of the pin pad. The meal cost will be automatically deducted from the account (once the pin number is entered) which a parent can deposit money into. The para-educators assigned to the lunch room and volunteers will monitor the room to check that each student is eating, assist students that need help opening things, and ensure that everyone is behaving during lunchtime. --Mr. Thierren, father of 1st grader

I don't really have time to read or take out everything from my child's home/school folder. What's so important in there?

If it is packed correctly, the important pages in the home/school folder will be in the right side pocket labeled "Bring Back to School". It will have class work that needs to be completed, important permission slips that need to be signed, or the cafeteria notice that your child's account is running low. The left side pocket "Leave at Home" will have the school newsletter and the specific grade newsletters on colored paper that need to be read so that your family is informed about what is going on at school in the near future. And it will also have completed class work to be kept as treasures of their efforts and hard work. --Mrs. Vaughn, PTA President and mother of 5th grader

Should I send any additional clothes or shoes to school with my child? If so when?

There is no need to send additional clothes with your child. However, for the first few weeks of school for kindergarteners, it would be best to enclose in your child's backpack, a change of clothing. Sometimes, our building gets much cooler or warmer than the weather outside. We also suggest dressing your child in layered clothing or bringing a sweater or sweatshirt. Closed toe and closed heel shoes (sneakers or tennis shoes) are the safest for your child's feet at school, especially for PE. -- Mrs. Kumi, mother of kindergarten and 4th grader

How often should I be in contact w/ my child's teacher? What are the best ways to communicate with the school staff?

I've found it helpful to communicate with my child's teacher as often as necessary. I may follow up before and after major testing, ask questions about her progress in order to identify areas of improvement. In addition, I've emailed for additional assignments to reinforce skills.

My daughter has been a GES student since kindergarten. During the last 4 years my family has communicated with GES staff using various forms of communication the red folder, meetings before and after school, school events, e-mail & PTA meetings. As parents our lives are busy with family, careers, continuing education and community involvement but the

nurturing and learning we provide our children is at the top of the list. Education is the cornerstone of our future leaders; therefore, we must go over and beyond to equip them with tools needed for success. --Mrs. Prather, mother of 4th grader

What does a typical day in the life of a GES student look like?

Students can enter the building at 8:50 and they report to their classroom at 9:05. Every classroom has a morning routine in place that will become second nature to your child. Students can expect to have a whole group lesson in reading, math and writing every day and a regular schedule of science and social studies. All students will meet in a small guided reading group at their instructional level every day and will regularly meet in a small math group as well. When not working directly with the teacher, students will engage in independent practice or center activities. Students usually have one special class each day on a rotating basis: PE, music, art, or media. Included in this busy day is a one hour block for lunch and recess. --Mrs. Henriquez, GES staff development teacher

I have a couple of questions about the arrival/dismissal procedures. If I am dropping off or picking up my child from school what should I do or not do? If my child will be a walker on some days, what time should I send him/her to school? Any other tips?

Staff supervision begins at 8:50 a.m. at the drop off and crosswalk areas. Crossing guards and some patrols arrive at 8:45 a.m. Please do not send your child prior to these times as there is no supervision. For car riders, please use the designated drop-off/pick-up area. The front loop is for busses only during this time. The gym side of the school is not for pick-up or drop-off of students by car. Students should enter/exit vehicles via the passenger side only. Please be sure to have students buckle up before pulling away at pick up time. If you park your car, you must accompany your child back to your vehicle. Please do not signal for your child to cross the lot to your car. This is dangerous to your student and for other drivers. The traffic flow is one-direction only. If your child does not exit the building quickly, please do not arrive to the car pick-up area too early so that we can maintain a smooth traffic flow.

If your child is a walker, parents/guardians of students are asked to wait outside the gym doors, or in the grassy area there, to wait for students so that students may easily exit the building during dismissal. A reminder that staff supervision of students begins at 8:50 a.m., so please be sure students don't arrive prior to that time.--Mrs. Ross and Mrs. Horbatuk, GES para-educators and patrol sponsors

Students in grades 3-5 have assignment books. What should I, as a parent, be doing with it? And what's the HW Board I've been hearing about?

As far as the assignment books, you should be checking it each night and matching it with the work your child is doing at home. This will ensure that all necessary work is being done and you can sign off on it as an indication to the teacher that you talked with your child about the assignment and it was completed. If there are any questions/concerns about the homework here is where you can make notes. The homework board is the place where teachers post the homework. If you are questioning what your child has written in their assignment book, you can double check on this site. You can access it through our school website. -- Ms. Marino, GES 5th grade teacher

I have a few questions about school banking. What bank offers student savings account services at GES? I think it is great that students can open bank accounts at the school but I am worried about giving my social security number to students or an adult I don't know. How can I open an account without giving up my personal information? How often will my child be allowed to make deposits? Can s/he withdraw money there too?

Sandy Spring Bank offers student banking at GES every Wednesday morning from 8:50am to 9:15am in the All-purpose room. The bank gives you several options in opening an account. One option is going to the bank in person and open an account (Milestone), or you can ask for the paperwork and mail it back in. This is an actual bank account (that is why you need a social security number) with Sandy Spring Bank that the child will have even when they leave Germantown Elementary. Only deposits can be made at the school - but feel free to go to the bank at anytime. It is a great opportunity for children to learn about savings. --Mrs. Anzalone, mother of 4th grader

I work full-time and am worried that the school or PTA will expect too much time from me. How do other working parents seem to manage?

In addition to supporting your child academically, there are two answers to what is expected of the parents: (1) Do what you can; and (2) everyone can do something! Consider the following:

- Stay aware - read the newsletters...
- If you have any useful talents / hobbies you can do in your spare time (like outreach/organizing, graphics, computer skills, etc.) tell the school and PTA!

- Mark your calendars and make advanced plans to attend important meetings – most of which have child care available – and school functions!
- Keep up with what's going on - read the newsletters...
- Serve on a committee that doesn't require time during the day such as an event planning or fundraising coordination committee.
- Feel free to praise, comment, or send a question to your child's teacher in an e-mail, which can be done any time day or night.
- Remember, many company holidays are not school holidays (Columbus Day, Veterans Day, etc). If you do have a day off and a couple hours to spare go have lunch with your child and ask his/her teacher if there is anything you can do. The teachers sometimes appreciate parental visits to read or share lessons with the classroom.
- Did I mention that you should read the newsletters?
- Many companies will allow employee time and other resources to be used for non-profit or civic activities... Check with yours and maybe they'll let you make 300 photocopies of a flyer a couple times a year. That would help take a burden off the school staff and supplies.
- Finally, be sure to read the newsletters! --Mrs. Shields, mother of 1st and 3rd grader

Why does Germantown have a School Improvement Plan (SIP)? Does that mean it is not a good school?

A School Improvement Plan (SIP) is the process that all Maryland schools use to ensure that all students are achieving at high levels. Having a SIP at Germantown enables our school to collect and analyze specific data to determine improvement priorities, make decisions about the goals we as a school want to achieve, and continuously measure progress toward achievement of those goals.

At Germantown, our SIP is a systematic process that enables our principal and teachers to turn our school into a more successful learning environment for all students. Germantown Elementary School's SIP includes a foundation for positive improvement results, meaningful teamwork, clear measurable goals and regular monitoring and analysis of performance data.--Mrs. Kumi, mother of kindergartener and 4th grader

Why should I attend school events?

Attending school events is a great opportunity to meet and interact with the school staff (Principal, Teachers, Counselors, etc.) as well as with other parents. Attending events will definitely help parents have a better idea of what is going on at the school. It is also a good occasion to share concerns or tips with other parents. --Mr. Thierren, father of 1st grader

When should I write notes to the school?

If your child is going home a different way, it is essential that the office have a note stating the complete details of who will be picking them up or the different mode of transportation they will be using that day. It is the school's responsibility to know how your child will get home and that it actually happens the way it is supposed to. If you want your child to leave school early, then a note should be brought that day stating the reason for early dismissal. This lets the teacher know that s/he will be leaving early. (Ms. Bryant notes: A note is better than calling the office at the end of the day which is one of the busiest times of the day. This will also reduce the risk of human error.)

If your child is absent from school, s/he should bring a note when s/he returns, stating the reason for the absence. The reason will determine if the absence is excused or unexcused. -- Mrs. Spurgeon, GES attendance secretary

My child is very shy; how will the teacher make sure s/he is included in the class discussions?

The teachers at Germantown use the random calling strategy*. This allows all students to be heard - not just the quick arm raisers. We realize that some students require more thinking time when questions are posed and this strategy allows them the time they need without the pressure of other students raising their hands quickly. If students are shy and this strategy causes them stress, signals can be set up between teacher and student to allow for some warning before names are called out loud. -- Ms. Marino, GES 5th grade teacher

*Random calling strategy - using calling sticks or some other device with student names to ensure "random" participation rather than the teacher just looking around the room for students who obviously has an answer. It keeps all students engaged and allows for more thoughtful answers.

If I don't see “eye to eye” with a teacher/staff member what should I do?

In some situations in our daily lives we must learn to agree to disagree with others. However, if you're experiencing a difference of opinion with your child's teacher I believe in all fairness there must be dialogue with the teacher first. If your dialogue with the teacher isn't helpful it's good to know there's a lead teacher for every grade level to further assist you. In addition, you also have Ms. Saunders, the school counselor as well as Ms. Bryant, the school principal as additional resources. -- Mrs. Prather, mother of 4th grader

How will I know what is happening at school?

There are lots of different ways to find out what's going on at GES. First of all, every Wednesday, you're child will bring home either *The NewsFlash* (a brief weekly newsletter), or *The Patriot* (a longer monthly newsletter) which will contain a look ahead calendar and articles about upcoming events. Second, there may be flyers about the events that come home. Both these will be sent in your child's "red folder" and/or posted on the school's web site as to keep abreast of your kid's schoolwork as well as the school events, it is very important to review its contents daily. Third, you will often get a phone call via "ConnectEd" – these are pre-recorded informational messages and you can listen or they can be left on an answering machine. Make sure GES has your correct phone number. A final way to keep up with what's going on is to attend the informative and important PTA meetings. All are welcome (and encouraged) to come to these meetings, generally are held 1st Tuesday of the month at 7:30 and child care is available - so it's easy to work it into your schedule and attend! -- Mrs. Shields, mother of 1st and 3rd grader

Why should I join the PTA? If I do, must I attend the monthly meetings or volunteer a lot at the school?

The Parent Teacher Association is an organization devoted to the improvement of the welfare of children and youth. PTA is the oldest and largest child advocacy organization in the country. PTA is the foremost proponent of parent involvement, and fostering effective parent involvement is the priority of PTA at every level. The National PTA promotes a national agenda for all children and youth by: focusing attention on achieving national education goals; working to guarantee access to health information and care; promoting safety in the home, school, and community, and advancing parenting education and the well being of the family. Attendance is not mandatory at the meetings held on the first Tuesday of every month. However, they are helpful for finding out what is going on in our school community and what we plan to do with our collected funds throughout the year.

From Wikipedia's definition: "A volunteer is someone who works for a community or for the benefit of environment primarily because they choose to do so. The word comes from Latin, and can be translated as "will" (as in doing something out of one's own free will)." Therefore, you don't have to volunteer at the school a lot unless it is something you want to do of your own free will. We set up opportunities for everyone to give a little to benefit the children and the community of Germantown Elementary School. --Mrs. Vaughn, PTA President and mother of 5th grader

What is one of the most important things the school wants me to do to support my child in being successful in getting along with other students in school?

A big part of students' development in elementary school is learning how to handle conflict with another individual outside of his/her own family. How a student handles him/herself in a conflictive situation can make a big difference in his/her ability to maintain friendships. One important thing to instill in your child is the importance of apologizing. Your child should understand that saying sorry is not admitting defeat; instead it is a way to keep the peace and keep a friend. A simple "I'm sorry" when someone is accidentally hurt or offended is a great way to stop a problem almost before it starts!

Another important thing to keep in mind to help your child get along with others is to practice empathy as much as possible. In other words try to get your child used to thinking about what it is like in another person's shoes. Many conflicts arise because students don't think about how their words or actions might affect another person. Also, children at the elementary school age tend to come to school with a lot of notions about how people "should" act, dress, eat, talk, etc. This can create difficulty in social situations because the children are quick to judge one another. Remind your child that every person and every family is different and that there is no "right" way to be...we all deserve respect regardless of our differences. -- Ms. Saunders, GES guidance counselor

*This Q & A is a new idea that I thought I'd try this year. Through out the year I always get questions from (especially new) families about various things happening in the school. Knowing how busy everyone is but also knowing that this summer mailing is one time that I am sure to have a captive audience, I felt this was a creative but effective means to help answer some "burning" questions you may have. I also thought it might be helpful to get some insight from parents and staff members. Depending on how well-received this idea is (or not) you may see more Q & As in the monthly PTA newsletter, *The Patriot*. Please let me know what you think! - Ms. Bryant, GES Principal