

Skills Academy Handbook

Grand Island Public Schools
123 North Webb Road
Grand Island, NE 68801



Skills Academy Locations & Staff

Kristy Hirschman, MAEd. ~ Skills Academy Director
khirschman@gips.org ~ 308-385-5888

Lori Peters ~ Skills Academy Secretary
mlpetersen@gips.org ~ 308-385-5888

Amber Tweten ~ Transition Specialist
atweten@gips.org ~ 308-385-5888

Dodge Elementary School

641 South Oak Street ~ Grand Island, NE 68801 ~ 308-385-5889

Jill Turek, K-2 Teacher ~ jturek@gips.org

James Potter, 3-5 Teacher ~ jpotter@gips.org

Samantha Minne, M.S., LIMHP ~ Counselor ~ sminne@gips.org

Westridge Middle School

4111 West 13th Street ~ Grand Island, NE 68803 ~ 308-385-5888

Demi Arres, 6-8 Teacher ~ darres@gips.org

Brenda Nash, 6-8 Teacher ~ bnash@gips.org

Rita Hernandez, M.S.W., PLMHP, Social Worker ~ rjhernandez@gips.org

Wyandotte Learning Center

315 Wyandotte Street ~ Grand Island, NE 68801 ~ 308-385-5945

Chantel Silva, 9-10 Teacher ~ csilva@gips.org

Travis Minne, 11-12 Teacher ~ tminne@gips.org

Crystal Van Winkle, M.S., LIMHP, Counselor ~ cvanwinkle@gips.org

Skills Academy Schedule

8:30 to 2:30 - Monday through Friday

Skills Academy follows the Grand Island Public Schools calendar (early dismissal days will be 1:30, typically these are the first 2 days of school, the day before Winter break and the last day of school)

Skills Academy Mission and Philosophy

Every Student, Every Day, A Success! In educating students, Grand Island Public Schools teaches hearts as well as minds; therefore, education is viewed as a life-long process which provides opportunities for each individual to reach their full potential. The Skills Academy is a district-wide, multi-tiered behavior program for those students who need intensive supports and instruction in behavioral and social-emotional skills. The main principles of the program include: multiple tiers of behavior support, evidence-based/scientifically validated interventions, progress monitoring, treatment integrity, data-based decision making, and collaborative problem solving. The program's main goal is to help students to build the skills necessary to be successful in order to transition back into the general education classroom.

The Skills Academy mission is to promote academic, behavioral, and social-emotional growth within a supportive environment based on positive behavior strategies, clear expectations, constructive feedback, and intensive social emotional learning. Every student, every day, a success!

Key Components of the Skills Academy

Tiered Program: Skills Academy utilizes a tiered program to provide structure and to assist students in recognizing their progress. Students will receive a daily behavior rating report sheet indicating their progress in demonstrating the three expected behaviors: Be Responsible, Be Respectful, and Be Safe. Students will utilize a token economy system to earn points that will be graphed and used to determine movement among the three tiers. Bonus points may also be earned for generalizing and utilizing targeted appropriate behaviors (e.g. following directions, staying on-task, appropriate participation, etc.) and can be spent weekly at the school store.

Individualized Academic Instruction: Students will receive academic instruction at their instructional level utilizing district curriculum materials aligned with state standards and graduation requirements.

Small Student to Staff Ratio: Skills Academy provides additional adult support including para-educators, counselors, and a school psychologist in addition to the teachers.

Alternate School Schedule: Students attend Skills Academy from 8:30 to 2:30 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. Wednesday dismissal is at 1:30.

Social-Emotional Skills: Teachers and counselors provide guidance lessons as well as group and/or individual therapy in social-emotional skills, emotional regulation, and social skills.

Positive Reinforcement System: Students are provided feedback consistently throughout their day focusing on the targeted behavioral goals (Be Safe, Be Respectful, and Be Responsible) within a token economy system. Additionally, students have the opportunity to earn time in the Honors Room each day as well as bonus points to purchase items from the school store. Students may also participate in other privileges when they progress through the tiers that will include field trips within the community and more activities at school.

Accountability: When students utilize maladaptive behaviors that are unproductive or unsafe to themselves or others, they will have the opportunity to complete tasks in the Reflection Room until they are ready to return to the classroom. Work not completed during the assigned class time will be placed in the “Do It Later” folder to be completed at a later time.

Communication: Depending on the tier level, communication among the student’s parents, home school, and Skills Academy staff will occur in the form of reports, emails, phone calls, and meetings scheduled to discuss progress and transition activities or problem solve difficulties.

Eligibility for the Skills Academy

Skills Academy is designed for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade to empower them to develop the strategies and skills to overcome maladaptive behaviors and transition back into the general education setting. *It is an option used only when exhaustive interventions have been implemented without success in the child’s general education/resource program including the following the levels of support in the Multi-System of Supports (MTSS) that includes all three tiers of instruction and support:*

Tier 1 Prevention for All Students: The school has implemented multi-tiered levels of support for all students to address the “whole child” including academics, physical health, and social/emotional health. The first level of supports for social/emotional health include: positive behavior supports, social emotional learning curriculum, proactive classroom management strategies, high quality interventions based on scientifically based research that intensifies as the need increases, and data-based decision making.

Tier 2 Support and Interventions for At Risk Students: Using data-based decision making, staff in each school will determine the need for increased support (Tier 2). This may include intensifying or adjusting the current intervention, adding additional supports, or changing the program. Teaching opportunities are provided for students to learn appropriate behaviors and positive reinforcement systems are implemented to reward appropriate behavior. The educational team continues to problem-solve using daily and weekly aggregated data, and decisions are made to continue, modify, intensify, or fade interventions when the intervention has been consistently and accurately provided.

Tier 3 Intensive Instruction and Support for Students with Intensive Needs: Students move along the continuum of services when their data indicates that even more support is needed (Tier 3). At this time the team may conduct a functional behavior assessment and develop a comprehensive behavior intervention plan that includes modifications and support within the environment, instruction to support appropriate behaviors, and an intensified positive reinforcement system. The education team continues to review data and adjust the student’s plan as needed. The team may also determine that a psycho-educational evaluation needs to be conducted to determine if the student meets verification guidelines for special education services. If the student verifies for services, an individualized education plan will be developed and implemented to address the areas of need.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team at the student’s school may determine that more intensive instruction is needed in order for a student to be successful. Students will be considered for this placement at Skills Academy when all other interventions and placement options have been exhausted. Placement is determined on an individual basis and is flexible to accommodate students when they are a danger to themselves and/or others, or so seriously disruptive as to infringe on the education of other students. The continuum of special education services at the building level must be exhausted prior to considering the more restrictive environment at Skills Academy. This may include:

- Multi-system of Support (MTSS)—the school has documented attempts to intervene with the student at each level for an extended period of time (4-6 weeks).
- Student data indicates a lack of response to multi-tiered levels of support (Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3) including implementation of a behavior intervention plan and data collected over 4-6 weeks indicates that it was unsuccessful.

- A formalized behavior support plan that included accommodations and services to support the least restrictive environment was developed and implemented without success, as determined by progress monitoring and treatment integrity data collected for 4-6 weeks.

Placement at Skills Academy is considered to be the most restrictive environmental setting available within the school district. Therefore, referral information and data will be reviewed by a team of Skills Academy staff including the coordinator, school psychologist, counselors, and special education director before determining placement. The referral team may request additional information or data in order to ensure that placement at the Skills Academy is the least restrictive environment at this time for the identified student.

Additional consideration may be given to students new to the district with evidence of previous restrictive placement (i.e. immediate placement in a restrictive setting is needed for safety) or there is evidence of a clinical diagnosis that requires an immediate protective setting.

Parental Involvement with Skills Academy

Parent involvement is an essential component of the program. Parents are vital team members in assisting the school in teaching, rewarding, debriefing, and prompting the student toward successful development of both academic and social/emotional skills. The following are guidelines, procedures, and expectations for parents:

- Please support students arriving on time. If they do not ride the bus, please bring the students on time, between 8:15 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Students that are not ready when the bus arrives will be transported to school by parents without reimbursement. Notify **Holiday Bus at 308-381-2019** regarding transportation needs including absences and changes.
- Assure that the student arrives at school well rested. Sleep hygiene and nutrition are important factors in the success of students. It is important that the student is encouraged to succeed in this program. Support and encouragement in their emotional well-being and academic growth are the most important factors for success.
- Notify the **Skills Academy office at 308-385-5888** if the student will not be in school, has an appointment, has had a change in medication, or if stressful events have occurred that may impact the student. Staff will attempt to provide additional support for the student if possible.
- Review the daily point sheets with your child and celebrate success with them. Meeting the percentage of points at 80% for daily, 85% for weekly, and 90% for natural is the expectation for students. There will be good days and more difficult days. The focus is on learning and growing—not being perfect! If the student did not make their daily goal, reinforce that tomorrow is a new day and they have the chance to start over. It is also important for the student to understand that all the adults in their lives are communicating and focusing on progress.
- Parents will be expected to participate in collaborative, problem solving team meetings every 4-6 weeks to discuss the progress the student is making in the program, address areas of concern, and develop transition plans back to the home school. Parental involvement in these meetings is essential for student success.

Points System

Points are used to provide incentives for following rules, meeting targeted objectives, and managing emotional responses. Intervals are determined to record rule adherence at the end of the 30- to 45-minute interval in a student/staff private debrief that earn points in 3 categories:

1. Be Respectful
2. Be Responsible
3. Be Safe

- 3 Points:** No need for teaching interaction - student responds to effective teaching practices (proximity, gestural cues, etc.)
- 2 Points:** Specific verbal prompt and a teaching interaction is needed
- 1 Point:** An additional teaching interaction is utilized AND the student complied soon after the interaction
- 0 Points:** Student did not comply after a teaching interaction was used or more than one teaching interaction for the SAME behavior within the same interval

Major Behaviors

Major Behaviors are behaviors that are not tolerated for any reason. These behaviors result in earning time in the Reflection Room (see below). These behaviors include:

- **Physically Unprovoked Aggression:** A student is physically aggressive for no apparent reason. This includes intimidating/threatening/harmful body language, actions, and gestures.
- **Physically Provoked Aggression:** A student is physically aggressive in response to an action from another student. This includes intimidating/threatening/harmful body language, actions, and gestures.
- **Significant Verbal Aggression:** Verbal aggression includes yelling, profanity, name calling, teasing, significant and continuous disruption, and other verbal interactions that may be perceived as aggressive/intimidating/threatening/harmful. The point system will be utilized to document verbal aggression.
- **Elopement:** A student who leaves the assigned area without permission or is not where he/she is supposed to be (no matter where the student is).
- **Vandalism or significant damage to property** that cannot be cleaned up or fixed and/or pulling the fire alarm or calling 911.

Leveling System

Daily: All students enter on the Daily Level. All instruction and activities occur with Skills staff. Students at the Daily Level do not have additional privileges and are escorted outside of the classroom by an adult. The student is given feedback about their behavior in increments and earns points within a token economy system. Students may purchase items in the school store with their bonus points every week after the Natural and Weekly Level students. Students move up to the Weekly Level when they have earned 17 of 20 days with at least 80% of the daily points per day. The last 7 days must be consecutively above 80% with no Major Behaviors. Monthly progress meetings will be held with the Skills Staff, parents, the student (when appropriate), and could include outside therapists and other agencies.

Weekly: Students earn additional privileges as determined by the classroom teacher and may participate in additional activities at school or in the community. The student is given feedback about their behavior and earn points within a token economy system. Students may purchase items in the school store with their bonus points after the Natural Level students. Students move up to the Natural Level when they have earned 17 of 20 days with at least 85% of the daily points per day. The last 7 days must be consecutively above 85% with no major Behaviors. If a student exhibits a major behavior, the student will be moved down to the Daily Level. After 7 consecutive days of meeting 80% of the daily goal with no Major Behaviors, the student will return to the Weekly Level. If a student does not meet their points 8 of 10 days they be moved down to the Daily Level. After 7 consecutive days of meeting 80% of the daily goal with no Major Behaviors, the student will return to the Weekly Level. Monthly progress meetings will be held with the Skills Staff, parents, the student (when appropriate), and could include outside therapists and other agencies.

Natural: Students will have all the privileges of the Weekly Level and will also be allowed additional privileges and outings for Natural Level students as determined by the classroom teacher. The student is given feedback about their behavior and earns points within the token economy system. A student on the Natural level is expected to meet 90% for their daily goal. Students at the Natural Level may purchase items in the school store with their bonus points before the other students. If a student exhibits a major behavior, the student will be moved down to the Weekly Level. If a student does not meet their points 8 of 10 days they are moved down to the Weekly Level. After 7 consecutive days of meeting 85% of the daily goal with no Major Behaviors, the student will return to the Natural Level. Monthly progress meetings will be held with the Skills Staff, parents, the student (when appropriate), and could include outside therapists and other agencies.

Transition: Students begin to transition to the classroom as determined by collaboration among the educational team that includes Skills Academy staff and the home school staff. Generally, this occurs once the student has completed 17 out of 20 days above 90% on the natural level depending on academic schedules and time of the school year. The last 7 days must be consecutively above 90% with no Major Behaviors. The team will consist of: Skills Academy staff (e.g. teacher, counselor, school psychologist, and coordinator), parents, student (if appropriate), and staff from the transition school. Additional transitions may take place as determined appropriate by the IEP team until the student is successful in the least restrictive environment.

Once the transition process has started, students who do not maintain their level will be reviewed by the leadership team to determine next steps for the student.

Honors Room

The Honors Room is an environment where students can practice social skills with various items which are reinforcing for students. Students are granted access to the Honors Room contingent on making their daily percentage based on their level. They have the opportunity to earn points on a daily basis based on behavior in their point system and then exchange these points for access to privileges and the Honors Room each day following the success of the previous day. This process teaches self-control and delayed gratification. The Honors Room is designed to include a variety of highly reinforcing and pleasurable activities and items (e.g. video games, iPads/Chromebooks/cell phones, board games, card games, Legos, art materials, toys, etc.) that motivate the students to exhibit the desired, expected behaviors. This room allows staff to work with students to increase student motivation and reinforce appropriate social-emotional skills.

If a student does not earn Honor's Room based on their Point Sheet, they will complete any "Do It Later" tasks, read, journal, or complete other assigned tasks given from the teacher.

Re-Boot Process

The re-boot process is when students must perform academic/restorative tasks under adult supervision in order to earn their way back into the classroom after demonstrating a major behavior.. The goal is for students to want to avoid needing to go through this process, by making the classroom a more exciting, inviting place to be. Students who are in the re-boot process during School Store, Honors Room, Outings, or other classroom privileges are not allowed access to these privileges. Tasks/folders are assigned based on the major behavior. Students return to the classroom when the tasks are completed, they have debriefed with an adult, and they have apologized for their behavior.

School Store

The school store is an area that will be accessed one day a week. Students can use bonus points they have earned to purchase items in the school store. Students at the Natural Level will have the opportunity to shop first, then students on the Weekly level followed by students at the Daily Level. If a student is in the Reflection Room during the school store time, they cannot access the school store that day, but may keep their bonus points to spend the following week.

Time Away/Break

Students are encouraged to use time away or a break from a situation in order to maintain emotional regulation and avoid major behaviors. The student moves to a location in the room designated for this purpose and remains there until he/she is ready to cope with the demands of the learning environment, or until a designated amount of time has elapsed. The student then returns to the assigned learning location and resumes the activity he/she was engaged in prior to the time away.

Time away is different from a time out. In a time out procedure, the student's access to reinforcement is removed or reduced for a specified time period contingent on a response. Time out is often used as a punishment for misbehavior. An effective use of time away is one in which the student can be privately encouraged to leave the activity as a cooling off period until he/she is ready to cope with the assignment or activity. It must be clearly conveyed that this is the student's choice and that this removal is not a punishment for misbehavior. If the teacher determines that a student is using this option too frequently, collaborative problem solving will be utilized to determine the reason for the frequency and a plan to minimize the use while providing appropriate support.

Outings & Innings

As students become more successful in the classroom, they can earn access to outings in the community and enrichment activities at school (innings) to further generalize appropriate behavior in an even less structured and supervised environment. Only students on the Weekly and Natural Levels can attend Outings and Innings. As students engage in desired behaviors and make good choices, they are provided with opportunities to earn increasingly more independence, autonomy, and trust. Activities may include but are not limited to: miniature golf, disc golf, bowling, fishing, museums, cooking, guest speakers, or a visit to the police station, park, bakery, etc. If a student is in the Reflection Room, he/she will lose the privilege of the outing/inning. Students must maintain a weekly average at or above their level for the five school days prior to the Outing to be eligible to participate in the activity. One sampling will occur when a student is on daily and is deemed appropriate by the student's team to be able to try an outing/inning.

Self-Governance

Self-governance meetings will occur once a week. These meetings will provide a specific opportunity to model adult behavior and for students to practice cooperation, mutual respect, responsibility, and social skills in a natural manner. Teachers receive assistance from students in rationally addressing class wide or individual problems when they occur. If students come to the teacher with a problem that can wait, the problem is put on the agenda for the self-governance meeting. This provides students an opportunity to solve the problem together. The agenda will include time for the students to give compliments to each other, discuss problems and solutions in a safe way using their social skills and “I” statements, and give suggestions for Honors Room activities, Outings, and school store items. Adults facilitate the meetings, but it is led by a student on the Natural Level.

Counseling Services

Students in Skills Academy will participate in group therapy, social emotional learning, emotional regulation, and social skills training provided by Skills Academy staff that includes Licensed Mental Health Providers, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and a School Psychologist. These skills will provide the students with the necessary social guidance that is relevant to their success in Skills Academy as well as in the general education setting.

This type of therapy/counseling will not take the place of any individual mental health counseling that the student is receiving from any outside mental health practitioners. If the student is actively receiving outside mental health counseling, a release will be requested from the parent of the student in order for there to be open communication between school and the therapist. Skills Academy staff will work together to best meet the counseling goals of the Skills Academy student. The therapy sessions at Skills Academy will not undermine the therapeutic rapport that has already been established with the student’s individual mental health practitioner.

Transportation

Students attending Skills Academy are eligible to receive special education transportation to and from school. Transportation services are contracted through Holiday Express and require a transportation contract to be completed. After submitting the paperwork to Holiday Express, please allow up to four days for the paperwork to be processed and the bus route to be adjusted to include the new student. Holiday Express will contact parents/guardians directly regarding the pick-up and drop off times. **All matters pertaining to transportation need to be addressed directly to Holiday Express at 308-381-2019.**

In order to run routes in a predictable and timely manner, it is important that students be at their designated stop several minutes in advance. Parents must inform the driver if they want to allow their child to depart at a location other than their designated stop. Any student missing their bus should let their parent know they will need a ride that day. When exiting the bus at the designated location, students must exit the bus and walk in front of it so the driver can see all passengers and only do so after the driver has signaled for students to cross the street. Parents are responsible for the supervision of their child until the student boards the bus and as soon as the child exits the school bus.

Transportation Rules:

- Treat all students and the driver with respect.
- Keep hands, feet, and other objects to yourself and inside the bus.
- No teasing, harassment, bullying, or fighting.

This transportation service is a privilege and students will be expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with expected classroom behavior. Bus drivers will report all infractions to the Skills Academy Coordinator, who will administer the consequences and notify parents. Following the verbal warning, students will lose their riding privileges. Parents will receive a phone call followed by written communication for any loss of privileges. Students will also review the bus expectations with the guidance counselor following each incident. If a student loses bus privileges other transportation means will be arranged or compensation will be arranged to ensure the child's IEP is being followed.

Consequences for Inappropriate Bus Conduct:

First Violation:	Warning by the bus driver (this will be the only warning)
Second Violation:	Loss of privilege to ride the bus for one week
Third Violation:	Loss of privilege to ride the bus for two weeks
Fourth Violation:	Loss of privilege to ride the bus for the remainder of the school year

Threat Assessments

Threat assessments are utilized to determine if an individual poses a threat to the safety of others in the school or to the school. A threat assessment will be communicated by a Skills Academy Leadership Team Member to the coordinator when a student or individual makes a threat, uses threatening behavior, or the person's behavior indicates an escalation in the potential for violence. The Threat Assessment Team will be composed of individuals from the Skills Academy, law enforcement personnel (school resource officer or School Safety Coordinator), and/or GIPS staff. This team will identify the persons involved, interview witnesses, utilize the GIPS threat assessment protocol to analyze the information, and will determine what interventions and safety precautions will be enacted. Parents will be notified as quickly as possible. Depending on the situation, students may be sent home in order to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Suicide Screeners

A suicide screener will be conducted by a Skills Academy social worker, counselor, or school psychologist when students make a suicidal threat/action or engage in self-harm. Students will be monitored by an adult until the evaluation can be completed during the same day. Parents will be notified to discuss the results of the screener as quickly as possible. At risk results will require notification of parents and the student's therapist. A high risk outcome will include referral to the Crisis Stabilization Unit at Mid-Plains Center for Behavioral Health and/or the student's individual mental health therapist. Following the further evaluation, parents will update Skills Academy staff with information regarding additional interventions and safety precautions. Health & Human Services and/or law enforcement will be notified if parents/guardians do not comply with the referral for further evaluation.

Transition and Exit Criteria

Return to General Education with Special Education Services

It is the intent of the program that all students will be served in their current least restrictive environment, which may or may not mean transitioning back to their home school. The IEP team and Skills Academy staff will collaborate with the student, parents, and home school staff regarding transition. A team meeting will be scheduled to provide parents, the student, and staff a comprehensive view of the student's performance in school. When appropriate (and as determined by data), the student will return to the home school as determined by the IEP team. Special education services at the home school will be determined by the IEP team with the support and recommendations of Skills Academy staff.

During transition activities, communication between the home school and Skills Academy staff will be crucial. Teachers will receive consultation and support to assist them in collecting the necessary data for progress monitoring on a daily basis as well as reporting on any academic areas which may require additional assistance. If the student demonstrates ongoing dysregulation, a meeting will be scheduled as soon as possible to discuss and problem solve these behaviors. If difficulties continue, the team will meet again to re-evaluate the student's readiness to return to the general education environment.

