

Gulf Coast Manatees Homeschool Group, Inc.

Family Handbook

2026–2027 Policies, Procedures & Family Expectations

Building Community Through

➤ Learning ➤ Service ➤ Fellowship

"Education is not just about filling a pail but igniting a fire that fuels a lifelong journey of discovery and growth. Let's continue to inspire and be inspired!"

— Jacqueline Van Dyke
Founder & President

Welcome to the Manatee Family

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." — Helen Keller

Welcome to Gulf Coast Manatees Homeschool Group, Inc. We are honored that your family has chosen to join our homeschool community. Gulf Coast Manatees is a parent-led, volunteer-powered Christian conservative homeschool co-op and registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving homeschool families throughout Citrus County and the surrounding communities. We enrich home education through hands-on classes, STEM, art, physical education, field trips, leadership opportunities, community service, and family events. More than a co-op, we are a community of families committed to learning, serving, encouraging one another, and building lasting friendships. Every Manatee Family helps make our co-op stronger, and we are grateful you are here. Our hope is that this handbook clearly explains our expectations while reflecting the welcoming, family-centered community we strive to build together.

Connect • Learn • Serve • Grow

Our Mission is to supplement children's education and physical fitness by providing hands-on learning opportunities in a positive, safe environment while encouraging meaningful relationships, community involvement, and lifelong learning.

Our Vision is that we all build meaningful and lasting relationships while enjoying our educational journeys.

The Manatee Way, we believe education is about more than academics. It is about building character, strengthening families, serving others, and helping every child discover the gifts God has given them. We believe learning happens best when families work together. Whether you volunteer, teach, encourage another family, or simply show up with a willing heart, your contribution makes our community stronger. Together, we are creating a place where children develop confidence, build lasting friendships, and experience the joy of learning.

Who We Are Gulf Coast Manatees Homeschool Group is guided by the mission, values, and principles upon which our organization was founded. We begin many of our gatherings with prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance because faith, patriotism, integrity, respect, and service are important parts of who we are. We also believe in maintaining an open-door community. Families from all backgrounds are welcome to attend our public classes, events, and activities and are welcome to apply for membership. While everyone may not share the same beliefs, we simply ask that all members and guests respect the mission, values, and culture of Gulf Coast Manatees. Our shared goal is to provide outstanding educational opportunities while fostering kindness, respect, responsibility, and a lifelong love of learning.

Our Core Values

- Faith
- Truth
- Integrity
- Respect
- Accountability
- Service
- Communication
- Collaboration

Membership is open to families actively homeschooling at least one child in Kindergarten through 12th grade and complying with Florida homeschool laws. Before joining, prospective families are encouraged to attend a public class or activity to meet our members and experience our co-op firsthand. By joining, each family agrees to support our mission, respect our policies, contribute positively to our community, and help provide a safe and welcoming environment for all.

Florida Nonprofit Information

Gulf Coast Manatees Homeschool Group, Inc. is a registered nonprofit organization.

Being a Manatee Family

One of the greatest strengths of Gulf Coast Manatees is the willingness of our families to work together. Every Manatee Family plays an important role in creating the positive, welcoming community that makes our co-op special. Membership is more than attending classes—it is partnering with other families to create meaningful educational experiences, lasting friendships, and opportunities for every child to thrive.

Membership

- Our membership year runs **August 1 through May 31**.
- Annual membership dues are **\$100 per child** and are non-refundable.
- Families joining between **August 1 and February 28** pay full membership dues.
- Families joining between **March 1 and July 31** may qualify for a prorated membership rate.
- Membership must be renewed each school year.

Some classes, field trips, special events, and activities may require additional fees. Any additional costs will always be shared before registration opens.

Family Participation

Gulf Coast Manatees is a parent-led, volunteer-powered organization. Every family contributes in some way to help provide affordable, high-quality opportunities for our children. Whether you volunteer your time, help organize events, secure sponsors, teach a class, or assist behind the scenes, every contribution strengthens our co-op. Each Manatee Family agrees to participate through volunteering, fundraising, and community service, or choose one of the contribution options outlined below.

Volunteering

Parents or guardians are asked to volunteer at least **three (3) times each school year**.

Volunteer opportunities may include:

- Assisting during classes
- Helping at events
- Supporting field trips
- Set-up and clean-up
- Teaching or assisting with a class
- Administrative or behind-the-scenes support

Families who prefer not to volunteer may choose the annual **Volunteer Contribution** by paying the **\$200 non-refundable contribution** with their membership dues. Families who initially choose to volunteer but later find they are unable to fulfill this commitment may make the contribution by **December 31**.

Fundraising

Fundraising allows Gulf Coast Manatees to keep membership affordable while expanding educational opportunities for our students.

Each family is asked to participate in **at least four (4) fundraisers each school year**.

Families may instead choose the annual **Fundraising Contribution** by paying the **\$500 non-refundable contribution** with their membership dues.

Families who secure **\$1,000 or more in sponsorships or donations** during the membership year will have their remaining fundraising requirement waived.

WinterFest is one of our signature annual events and remains a required co-op activity.

Community Service

Serving others is one of the core values of Gulf Coast Manatees.

Community service teaches compassion, responsibility, leadership, and stewardship while giving our students opportunities to positively impact Citrus County and beyond. Each family is asked to participate in **two (2) community service opportunities each school year**. These events also provide excellent volunteer service hours for our middle and high school students. Families who are unable to participate may instead make a **\$100 Community Service Contribution**, which helps support outreach projects, community partnerships, and service initiatives.

Food & Supplies

Throughout the year, families may occasionally be asked to bring food or supplies for classes, parties, or special events. Families who prefer not to provide requested items may instead contribute **\$10** toward supplies when registering for the event.

Payments

We currently accept:

- Cash
- Check
- Zelle
- Zeffy

Zelle: gcmanatees@gmail.com

Payment instructions for classes, field trips, merchandise, and special events will be shared through **our member communication platform**.

Manatee Gear

We encourage every student to wear a current Gulf Coast Manatees shirt during field trips, community events, and other co-op activities. Adult shirts are also available and encouraged. Current designs, pricing, and ordering information are shared through **our member communication platform**.

Learning Together

At Gulf Coast Manatees, our goal is to provide a safe, engaging, and respectful learning environment where every child has the opportunity to succeed. Parents, students, volunteers, and teachers all share the responsibility of creating a positive experience for everyone.

Classroom Expectations

Our volunteer teachers spend many hours preparing engaging, hands-on lessons for our students. We ask every family to help us create a classroom environment where learning can flourish.

Students are expected to:

- Listen respectfully while others are speaking.
- Follow directions from teachers and volunteers.
- Participate to the best of their ability.
- Treat classmates, teachers, and volunteers with kindness and respect.
- Care for classroom materials and supplies.
- Help keep classrooms clean and organized.

Items that may distract from learning—including toys, games, trading cards, handheld electronics, or music devices—should remain at home unless specifically requested by the teacher for a class activity.

Parents in the Classroom

We love having parents involved and appreciate your support. To help minimize distractions and allow students to remain focused, we ask that only the assigned teacher and classroom volunteer remain inside the classroom during instruction unless otherwise requested. Parents are always welcome nearby and are encouraged to enjoy fellowship with other families while classes are in session. If a child needs assistance or a break during class, a classroom volunteer or board member will communicate with the parent as needed.

Cell Phones & Electronic Devices

To help students stay engaged, cell phones and electronic devices should remain put away during class unless they are being used for an approved educational purpose. Teachers may use electronic devices for attendance, presentations, or classroom instruction. If a parent needs to answer an urgent phone call, we simply ask that they step outside the classroom.

Dress for Success

Students should dress appropriately for the day's activities while maintaining modesty and respect for our learning environment. Because many of our activities include outdoor play, physical education, science exploration, or field trips, families are encouraged to dress comfortably and wear appropriate footwear. We also encourage students to proudly wear their Gulf Coast Manatees shirts during co-op classes, events, field trips, and community activities.

Field Trips

Field trips are one of the highlights of our co-op and allow students to learn beyond the classroom.

As representatives of Gulf Coast Manatees, we ask every family to:

- Arrive on time.
- Treat hosts, staff, volunteers, and fellow families with courtesy and respect.
- Follow all safety instructions.
- Wear a current Gulf Coast Manatees shirt whenever possible.

Because many field trip venues require group entry, families arriving more than **15 minutes late** may not be admitted and refunds may not be available.

Caring for Our Facilities

We are grateful to the churches, community organizations, businesses, and parks that generously allow us to use their facilities. Every Manatee Family shares the responsibility of treating these spaces with care. Our goal is simple: **Leave every facility cleaner than we found it.** By working together to clean classrooms, return furniture, dispose of trash, and care for our surroundings, we help maintain the excellent reputation Gulf Coast Manatees have earned throughout our community.

Working Through Concerns

Healthy communication helps our community remain strong.

If questions or concerns arise, we ask families to approach them respectfully and follow these simple steps:

Step 1

Whenever appropriate, first speak directly with the individual involved in a respectful manner.

Step 2

If the concern cannot be resolved, please submit your concern by email to the Board of Directors.

Step 3

If additional discussion is needed, an in-person meeting may be scheduled with at least two board members present. If concerns involve a field trip location, community partner, instructor, or guest speaker, please contact the Board before addressing the concern publicly. This allows us the opportunity to understand the situation and work toward an appropriate resolution while protecting the relationships that help make our programs possible.

Our Commitment to Respect

Every child deserves to feel safe, valued, and included. Students are expected to treat others with kindness and respect at all times.

The following behaviors are not acceptable:

- Physical aggression or fighting
- Bullying or intimidation
- Name-calling or harassment
- Threatening behavior
- Intentional destruction or theft of property
- Profanity or inappropriate language
- Possession of weapons
- Any behavior that places another person at risk

Our goal is always to teach, guide, and restore whenever possible while maintaining a safe environment for every family. When behavior concerns arise, we will communicate with parents promptly and work together toward a positive solution. Repeated or serious violations may result in written warnings, suspension from activities, or dismissal from the co-op at the discretion of the Board of Directors.

Bullying, illegal activity, or behavior that threatens the safety of others may result in immediate dismissal.

Dismissal of Membership

Our hope is always to work through concerns with kindness, grace, and open communication. However, Gulf Coast Manatees reserve the right to suspend or terminate membership when a family's actions place the safety, well-being, or mission of the organization at risk.

Examples may include, but are not limited to:

- Repeated violations of handbook policies
- Bullying or harassment
- Threatening or abusive behavior
- Illegal activity
- Theft or intentional property damage
- Possession of weapons at co-op activities
- Conduct that significantly disrupts the safety or operation of the organization

Membership decisions are made by the Board of Directors after careful consideration of the circumstances. The Board's decision is final.

Staying Connected & Protecting Our Community

Good communication helps our co-op stay organized, informed, and connected. We ask every Manatee Family to help us maintain a positive and supportive community both in person and online.

Member Communication

Our member communication platform is the primary source for co-op information.

Families should regularly check the platform for:

- Class announcements
- Event registration
- Field trip information
- Calendar updates
- Volunteer opportunities
- Fundraising information
- Important notices from the Board

Keeping your contact information current helps ensure you don't miss important updates.

Social Media

Gulf Coast Manatees maintains public social media pages and a website to celebrate our students, promote our programs, recognize our sponsors, and share upcoming events with the community.

Families are encouraged to:

- Share our public posts.
- Invite other homeschool families to attend public events.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of our students and volunteers.
- Help us positively represent Gulf Coast Manatees within our community.

We ask that members use discretion when discussing co-op matters online and avoid posting comments that could harm the reputation of another family, volunteer, instructor, community partner, or the organization. Questions or concerns should always be brought directly to the Board so they can be addressed appropriately.

Photography & Media

Throughout the year we take photographs and videos during classes, field trips, special events, graduations, performances, and community activities.

These images may be used for:

- Social media
- Our website
- Newsletters

- Yearbooks
- Graduation materials
- Promotional materials
- Sponsor recognition
- Grant applications
- Community outreach

Each family indicates their media preferences during the membership process, and we are committed to honoring those choices. Members may not photograph or publish images of another child without the permission of that child's parent or guardian. We appreciate everyone's help in protecting the privacy and preferences of all families.

Respecting Our Programs

Our classes, curriculum, special events, original program ideas, and educational materials are developed through countless volunteer hours. To protect the work of our volunteers and the organization, these materials may not be copied, reproduced, or used to create competing programs without written permission from the Gulf Coast Manatees Board of Directors. We encourage sharing our mission and inviting others to experience Gulf Coast Manatees through participation in our public events.

Safety & Liability

The safety of our families is always a top priority. While every reasonable effort is made to provide a safe environment, participation in classes, field trips, outdoor activities, and special events involves inherent risks. By participating in Gulf Coast Manatees activities, families acknowledge these risks and accept responsibility for supervising their children whenever appropriate. Parents and guardians remain responsible for the supervision, medical needs, and behavior of their children throughout all co-op activities unless otherwise specified for a particular event.

Thank You

Thank you for choosing Gulf Coast Manatees Homeschool Group.

We recognize that every family has many options for their homeschool journey, and we are honored that you have chosen to become part of ours. Together, we will learn, serve, encourage one another, and create memories that will last a lifetime. **Welcome to the Manatee Family!** We look forward to an incredible year together.

BOARD MEMBERS: Jacqueline Van Dyke President (407)369-0327

Rebekah Dickinson Secretary (352)

Justin Goldsbury Treasurer (954)213-3843

Florida Solicitation Registration #: CH71257

A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling 800-435-7352 within the State of Florida. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.