



Alexandria Public Schools

Project Life

Handbook 2026-2027

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Future, Your Dream, Your Team

Each individual participating in Project LIFE is unique. You are here to make a better future for yourself. It is very important that you “self-advocate” or communicate what you want so that those supporting you can better assist you in your journey to adulthood and employment. If you need assistance with self-advocacy, Project LIFE staff can help you or perhaps refer you to a local advocacy group. ***Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It requires knowledge of your personal strengths, needs and rights as a citizen.***

In order for Project LIFE to help you achieve your future goal of community employment your team will need to meet regularly. These “Employment Planning Meetings” are designed to gather information, set goals, and develop a plan for your future. You are welcome to invite anyone you wish to attend these meetings, and Project LIFE staff are available to help in contacting anyone who you would like to invite. If there is someone that you would like to have kept informed of your progress, with your permission, your instructor can contact him/her with updates. These people will be your team!

Reasonable Accommodations

Project LIFE staff will work in collaboration with business site managers to ensure work training sites are accessible to our student interns. If you are in need of a reasonable accommodation, please let staff know how they can assist you. **A reasonable accommodation is a change or adjustment to an environment that makes it possible for an individual with a disability to perform their job effectively.**

Vision Statement

We believe that everyone deserves to live a dignified life. The Project LIFE model is rooted in the understanding that the talents and interests of people with disabilities are as varied and individual as they are among any group. We assert that everyone has the right and capacity to pursue vocational opportunities that will promote and enhance their economic independence and participation as citizens of the community.

Program Description

Project LIFE is a combined education and work experience program in collaboration with Douglas County Social Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), Alexandria Public Schools and area business partners. It is designed for students with disabilities who have completed their high school academic requirements, but have chosen to continue their education in a transition to work program.

Alexandria Public School's Project LIFE programs are designed to be a transition to adulthood learning continuum. The goal is to prepare students with disabilities for integrated, community employment and increased overall independence. The progression through the programs are based on each individual student's progress. The program day consists of life skill focused classroom instruction in combination with time spent in authentic community work based learning environments. The program follows Alexandria Public Schools calendar.

Important Information You Should Know

Alexandria Public Schools Project Life program is a collaborative effort with several local community businesses that partner to provide opportunities for students to participate in job skill training experiences.

Alexandria Public Schools is responsible for administering the program and employs the Job Training Coordinator/Instructor/Intervention Specialist as well as the skills trainers for the Project LIFE program. The Lead Skills Trainer and Skills Trainers monitor and support the student interns in the classroom and work experience/job training assignments.

The student interns typically participate in three 10-12 week job training rotations during the course of the Project LIFE school year. Differing job training locations, business site supervisory personnel and Skills Trainers help to expand the vocational skills of the students and their ability to work for individuals with different communication styles.

After completing one year of Project LIFE, students may participate in a second year of Project LIFE or accept their diploma and exit school services to pursue employment.

Remember: The goal of Project LIFE is to prepare students with disabilities for future integrated employment in the community.

If a student is failing to make adequate progress as evidenced via IEP progress reports, curriculum assessments, job training reports, and/or documented behavioral concerns, there will be ample opportunity to address the concerns through regular correspondences between parents and instructors as well as during the fall and spring employment planning meetings. Additional meetings may also take place at the request of the instructor, parent, or student intern. If the IEP team determines that the structure of the program is not an appropriate learning environment/placement for the student, they will make all efforts to assist them with a smooth transition from the program while working to identify services/programming that will better meet their needs.

Transportation

Alexandria Public Schools will provide transportation to and from the Project LIFE program location. District transportation, as well as, Community transportation options will be used during the program day.

Note: Students being dropped off by guardians or others should not arrive at the site prior to 8:00 a.m. Students not taking transportation home from the program should arrange to be picked up no later than 2:15 p.m.

Transportation related issues and concerns need to be addressed with district transportation personnel. They can be reached at 320-762-3317.

Daily Schedule

The following times are approximate and depend on a number of factors, which could include transportation, job training site needs, and individual students.

Monday - Thursday:

8:00 AM - 8:15 AM - Arrival (Check schedule and prepare for the day)
8:15 AM - 8:45 AM - **Fit 4 Work**
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM - **Work Sites**
11:15 AM - 11:45 AM - **Lunch/Break**
11:45 AM - 12:15 PM - **Project 101 Curriculum**
12:30 PM - 1:30 PM - **Community Exploration**
1:30-2:15 PM - **Project 101 Curriculum**
2:15 PM - **Dismissal**

Friday:

8:00 AM - 8:15 AM - Arrival (Check schedule and prepare for the day)
8:15 AM - 8:45 AM - **Fit 4 Work**
9:00 AM - 11:00 AM - **Work Sites**
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM - **Project 101 Curriculum**
12:15 PM - **Dismissal**

Lunch

At the Project LIFE program, students **do not have access to a cafeteria**. Students are expected to pack their own lunch daily. Project LIFE locations provide microwaves for preparation of meal items as well as a refrigerator and freezer for food storage. Students and parents should consider the items being packed for lunch, to include nutrition and preparation. A general guideline is that students should be able to prepare, eat and clean-up their meal within a thirty minute lunch break.

Policies

The following policies have been put into place in order to simulate the real-world employment expectations as closely as possible. These policies are important to help prepare student interns for integrated community employment.

The Alexandria Area High School Code of Conduct will be used for all policies, rules and regulations not addressed in this handbook and can be found at Alexandria Public Schools website under Schools-Alexandria Area High-School-About-Student Handbook or at the following link School-<https://aahs.alexschools.org/our-school/student-handbook>.

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend Project LIFE **every day**. When a student intern is unable to attend Project LIFE, **he or she must contact the instructor directly**. This can be done by calling the instructor (a phone call is expected unless texting has been indicated by the instructor to be appropriate). If the instructor is not available, the student intern will need to leave a message with name and reason for the absence. (See page 17 for a “call off” script that students can use to assist them).

Two (2) absences are permitted per rotation (18 weeks) without a doctor’s note, but every absence thereafter requires a doctor’s note. On the day the student intern returns, a provided absence form must be completed and given to the instructor.

If the student is aware of an upcoming absence, a “Request for Time Off” form must be completed at least three (3) days prior to the absence and given to the instructor for approval. This can be used for scheduled doctor appointments, agency meetings and interviews.

Important Note:

The following steps may be utilized for absences exceeding the two (2) without a doctor’s note and/or (2) no-call no-show absences. Students who are ½ hour tardy past the program start time will be considered as an unexcused absence.

1st Offense

A meeting will be held with the student intern and the instructor over the phone with a parent/guardian and a letter will be sent home for signature and returned the next day to the instructor. Notification will be sent to the Transition Center administrator.

2nd Offense

A team meeting will be scheduled to discuss the absences and create a plan to ensure attendance meets program guidelines. The team will consist of the student intern, parent/ guardian, instructor, Transition Center administrator, and any others supporting this intern.

3rd Offense

A team meeting will be scheduled to discuss possible dismissal from the program. If dismissal is not agreed upon by the team an action plan will be put in place to deter further absences. The outcome will be a team decision. Dismissal may be considered if further absences occur.

Contact Information

Instructors may be contacted between the hours of 7:30a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Beth Ingersoll

Project LIFE Instructor
720 Broadway Street
Alexandria, MN 56308
320-762-2142 ext. 5755
bingersoll@alexschools.org

Sara Richards

Transition Center Supervisor
1410 South McKay Ave. S., Ste.201
PO Box 308
Alexandria, MN 56308
320-762-2141 ext. 4296
Cell: 320-760-5298
srichards@alexschools.org

Inclement Weather

Student interns are to follow the closings/delay determinations for Alexandria Public Schools.

Program Orientation

Back to school orientation is a **required event**. This event is designed to ensure each participant and their family has been presented with an overview of the program and its requirements. This is also a time for students and their families to have any questions answered. Students are responsible for their own transportation to and from this evening event.

Your program instructor will provide you with the date and times for this event, and it will be listed on the Project LIFE calendar they will provide you as well.

Open House

Project LIFE hosts an evening program “Open House” each year. Student participation in the open house is **required**. At the open house, students will share information about their current job rotation and other activities within the Project LIFE program to prospective students. Student interns are responsible for their own transportation to and from this evening event.

Progress Reports

IEP progress reports will be based on the student’s IEP goals. Reports will be sent home to Parents/guardians 2 times per year. Student interns and parent/guardian will also receive a course of study progress report at the end of each rotation and job training report data at the Employment Planning Meetings.

Life Planning Meetings

Each student intern will have at least two scheduled life planning meetings throughout the year in addition to their annual IEP meeting. Each student's IEP team will be invited to participate in these meetings. This team consists of the program instructor, student intern, parent(s)/guardian(s), Transition Center Supervisor, County case manager (if applicable) and a counselor from VRS (if applicable).

All life planning meetings will be scheduled well in advance in order to allow ample opportunity for all members of the team to attend during the school day. Additional life planning meetings can be scheduled as needed to meet the needs of the student and as determined by the IEP team.

Job Training Rotations

Each student intern will participate in two (2) job training experiences or rotations. Each rotation is 18 weeks. During the first two weeks of the new school year, each student is evaluated and placed in the most appropriate job training location based on the Project LIFE team's recommendation. Student interns will be evaluated each rotation by both the instructor and assigned Skills Trainer.

Note: Job training business partners may refuse access to any student who does not meet business site standards and policies for fitness, duty, health, safety, dress, appearance, proper identification, or ethical behavior. If this were to occur, the IEP team may reconvene to discuss another educational environment for the student outside of Project LIFE.

Skills Trainers

A Skills Trainer is an employment training professional who provides job-site training support, assessments and on-site fading supervision for individuals with disabilities who may have difficulty securing and maintaining competitive employment independently. At Project LIFE, a Skills Trainer assists a group of 4-5 student interns by providing specialized training and job related support services sometimes referred to as reasonable accommodations in the world of work. They also record daily notes and provide detailed weekly reports on student progress to the instructor.

A Skills Trainer provides these services until the student intern can perform the tasks independently. This determination depends on the student's ability to follow the

department rules and tasks of the job training environment in a safe and independent manner. This time can take anywhere from one week to ten weeks. It is very individualized.

Dress Code

Student interns are required to wear a uniform shirt and tan or black pants every day to their job site. Students will need to purchase at least three uniform shirts from the provided on-line store link. Additional uniform shirts or other apparel can be purchased if desired. This information will be shared with families at the open house.

Student interns can choose to wear either black or tan pants with their uniform shirt. A belt must also be worn (unless disability prohibits and a reasonable alternative can be agreed upon). The pants must be clean, free of tears or frayed edges. Sports pants, sweat pants, shorts, or capri style pants are not allowed.

Footwear must protect the heel and toes. Tennis shoes or casual dress shoes are the only suitable options. Sandals, flip-flops or croc shoes are not acceptable. If specific footwear is needed, the instructor will assist you in where to purchase them.

Student interns must wear their program issued name badge during program hours. Sweatshirts or jackets worn over uniform are not permitted while at the job site. During the colder months, students are permitted to wear a clean, white or black shirt under their uniform shirts.

Hygiene

An employment standard of hygiene must be maintained at all times. To achieve this level of hygiene, students should shower daily to eliminate body odor and keep hair clean. Student interns also need to maintain a clean, shaven face, clipped and clean fingernails, clean clothes and a business appropriate hair style.

Lockers

Students at Project LIFE will be given a locker or similar personal space for their belongings. They are responsible for all materials they bring to the program. Alexandria

Public Schools, nor business partners, will be responsible for any items lost or taken from the Project LIFE program classroom, work site or buses.

Electronic Devices

Student use of personal electronic devices such as cell phones are up to the individual program instructor and must be adhered to. Students that typically use these devices to keep track of time may need to find another method. This excludes devices used for assistive communication purposes. Alexandria Public Schools are not responsible for lost, stolen, broken or misplaced devices.

Community Based Trips

Student interns will participate in community-based outings throughout the year. These trips include restaurants, shopping trips and other activities. Prior to these trips, students will discuss appropriate behavior, etiquette required at the locations and a budget to maintain (when necessary). Some experiences may include restaurants such as delivery/ordering in, fast food, buffet style, casual dining, and possibly more formal dining opportunities. The activities will be selected in advance along with the cost of the outing. A letter will be sent home detailing the trip and the estimated amount that the meal will cost. A student intern may always bring more money than required.

Project LIFE Newsletters

Project LIFE is a program that requires participation from all parties involved with the enrolled student intern. In order to assist parents/guardians, social workers, and others in staying up to date on current events within the program, a newsletter will be sent home quarterly. It is important that students and families review this newsletter when it is sent home. The purpose of the newsletter is to inform all parties involved of upcoming events, recent instructional topics, and information from supporting agencies.

Program Course of Study
Curriculum Focus Across 3 Domains
WORK HOME COMMUNITY

- Safety Skills
- Self-Determination
- Independence
- Social and Communication Skills
- Financial Skills
- Technology Skills

Responsibilities of Program Collaborators

Project LIFE is designed to help each student intern and their families work in partnership with their collaborators.

Student Intern Responsibilities:

- Agree to serve a 45-day trial period during which the student intern will be assessed to ensure the program is an appropriate placement setting.
- Agree to seek the next transitional step at the completion of the Project LIFE program.
- Maintain appropriate attendance in alignment with program attendance and work site standards.
- Conduct self appropriately in the classroom and on the work assignments, according to the standards established by the work site and program policy, including all safety regulations.
- Learn and perform duties and tasks identified in the job descriptions for each assigned work site.
- Actively participate in periodic employment planning meetings.

Parent/Guardian Responsibilities:

- Support their son/daughter's interest and desire to pursue their next transitional step in the community after Project LIFE.
- Assist their son/daughter in understanding the requirements of the Alexandria Public Schools Project LIFE program.
- Participate in the Alexandria Public Schools Project LIFE orientation and employment planning meetings with their son/daughter.

Alexandria Public Schools Responsibilities:

- Manage and operate Project LIFE in cooperation with its collaborators.
- Develop Project LIFE program description and maintain on-going communications regarding program start-up, operation and evaluation with partner agencies.
- Employ licensed staff to serve as Project LIFE Instructors to provide instruction and on-site coordination of the program, including provision of Skills Trainers.
- Coordinate communication with work site/business, participants and their families regarding Project LIFE and any issues or concerns.
- Coordinate application screening committee and make final selection of program participants.
- Hold IEP meetings and provide services as documented in the individual's IEP.
- Report participant's attendance and IEP progress to the appropriate parties

Referring Special Education Teacher Responsibilities:

- Refer eligible students based on IEP team decision and post-secondary transition goals.
- Assure that application packets are complete and submitted.
- Arrange for transportation of participants

Business Site Responsibilities:

- Provide a contact person/liaison to assist in planning, communication and implementation of Project LIFE.
- Define workplace expectations, processes and rules.
- Identify potential work assignments and assist in developing and modifying those assignments.
- Provide job descriptions for work assignments if available.
- Assist in orientation, training, and evaluation of Project LIFE participants as necessary

Project LIFE On-Site Concerns an Appeals

1. Contact the Project Life Instructor whenever there are questions or concerns regarding the provision of services, including Skill Training services or the expectations of the Project LIFE site.
2. If your Project LIFE program questions or concerns are not resolved, contact the Transition Center Supervisor, Sara Richards at 320-762-2141 ext. 4296.
 - a. If your questions or concerns relate to transportation; contact transportation directly at 320-762-331.
3. If your Project LIFE site question or concerns are not resolved, contact the Director of Student Support Services, Dr. Michelle Bethke-Kaliher at 320-762-2141 ext. 4297.

Discharge from the Project LIFE Program

1. Students are required to participate in the program consistent with the policies and procedures of the classroom and job training environment, the Project LIFE Handbook and the Alexandria Area High School Code of Conduct in accordance with training and direction given to them by the Project LIFE Site Instructor/Coordinator, Skill Training staff and the business site personnel who supervise them in their work assignments.
2. Students will be reviewed during the initial forty-five (45) day trial period to determine whether they continue to meet the eligibility criteria for the Project LIFE program:
 - If the student does not meet the eligibility criteria, the Project LIFE team may recommend that the student be discharged from Project LIFE program following the procedures listed below:
 - A. Communication with student interns, their families, and any other appropriate support personnel will take place regarding any emerging concerns the student is presenting at the Project LIFE program and strategies will be implemented to correct the situation. This includes the 45-day trial period as well as the remainder of the Project LIFE year.
 - B. If improvement is not made an IEP meeting will be arranged with the student intern and parents to discuss resources/supports available from the district or other agencies that may be implemented to address the concern(s).

C. If the supports and interventions are not successful in addressing the concern(s), the IEP team will meet again to determine whether the student is in the appropriate learning environment.

D. Serious infractions that violate the rules of the business site, the Alexandria Public Schools Code of Conduct or constitute unlawful activity may result in automatic suspension or discharge from the Project LIFE program without the intervening steps noted above.

E. Recommendations for suspension or discharge of a student are made by the Project LIFE Team (Assistant Director of Student Support Services/Transition Center Supervisor, Director of Student Support Services, Program Instructor, and Lead Skills Trainer).

F. Notification letters are sent to family/student

In addition:

1. Documentation will be provided to the IEP Team for assistance in determining an appropriate educational placement.
2. If the student and/or family wish to appeal the discharge, they must notify the Transition Center Supervisor, in writing within 5 calendar days after receipt of the notification of discharge.
3. The Transition Center Supervisor appoints an Appeal Review Panel including:
 - a. Project LIFE representative(s)
 - b. Business partner representative
4. The Appeal Review Panel schedules appeal presentation by family/student.
5. Family/student makes presentation to the review panel (15 minutes maximum). Family/student may request a parent mentor or another advocate to assist in the appeal presentation.
6. The Review Panel reviews the information provided at the appeal presentation in light of the infraction(s) and previous strategies implemented and submits recommendation to the Director of Student Support Services. The Director of Student Support Services makes an appeal review decision and sends notification letters to family/student and their IEP team.
7. If the discharge is upheld, the team should convene to determine an alternative placement

Calling In Sick



1. Dial your work number: _____ - _____ - _____



2. Say:

"May I speak to _____ please?"
(supervisor's name)



3. Wait until the person answers.



4. Say:

"This is _____. I will not be at work today." (your name)

"I am sick."

"I will try to be back tomorrow."

"Good-bye"

Notes

Acknowledgment of Receipt of Project LIFE Handbook

After reviewing this handbook together with your parent/guardian, please sign and return this form to your program instructor.

The Project LIFE Handbook contains important information about the program and I understand that I should consult a program instructor regarding any questions not answered in the handbook.

My parents and I understand that by being accepted to Project LIFE that I am agreeing to abide by the rules of the program and fully participate for the entire school year.

In addition, I agree that I will give my best effort every day so that I can gain skills needed to reach my goal of future employment in my community.

I have received a copy of the Project LIFE Handbook and reviewed it carefully.

Student Intern Signature _____ Date: _____

Parent Signature _____ Date: _____

Instructor Signature _____ Date: _____