



Life Skills Academy

Parent/Student Handbook

2026-2027

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Welcome Letter from the Principal

Dear Families,

Welcome to Life Skills Academy—where education looks different, on purpose.

At LSA, we exist to serve students with disabilities who need something beyond what a typical school can offer. Whether your child is just beginning their school journey or preparing for adulthood, our mission is the same: to meet them where they are, challenge them to grow, and surround them with the support they need to become confident, capable, and independent individuals.

We believe every student deserves an education that reflects their strengths, respects their challenges, and prepares them for real life. That's why we keep class sizes small, embed therapies directly into the school day, and design our academic programs to be flexible, individualized, and meaningful. Whether a student is working toward independent living, technical school, or competitive employment, we are intentional about helping them build both the academic foundation and the life skills to get there.

But we're more than a school—we're a community. We know the path you're on isn't always easy, and we don't expect you to walk it alone. Our team of teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and support staff are here not just for your child, but for you. We'll work together on everything from daily routines and behavior plans to guardianship, Vocational Rehabilitation, and long-term transition planning.

We are not a place where kids come to be babysat, and we are not a place where they fall through the cracks. We are a place where students are seen, supported, and expected to grow. That growth might look different for every child, but we celebrate every milestone—big or small—because we know how hard our students work to get there.

Thank you for trusting us to be part of your child's journey. We're glad you're here.

Warm regards,

Terry Gier
Principal, Life Skills Academy

Introduction

Overview

Life Skills Academy offers a unique educational experience for children whose diverse and special needs are not met at most other schools. We understand that every child is unique, which is why our education is tailored to the individual needs of each student. With small classroom sizes and a paraprofessional in every classroom, we ensure that each student receives the attention and support they require. At LSA, we take a holistic approach to education which incorporates education, therapy, and career training.

Our Mission Statement

At Life Skills Academy, our mission is to empower students with diverse learning needs to achieve their full potential. We provide personalized education and support in a nurturing and inclusive environment, fostering academic growth, independence, and lifelong success. Our comprehensive approach integrates education, therapy, and career preparation to equip students with the skills and confidence to thrive in a rapidly changing world, enabling them to become active and engaged members of their communities.

School Philosophy

We believe every child is capable of learning, growing, and contributing in meaningful ways. Our philosophy is rooted in the understanding that education must be individualized. We recognize that children with disabilities learn differently, and we embrace those differences as strengths. Rather than asking students to fit into a traditional mold, we build an educational experience around who they are, how they learn, and what they need to thrive.

We prioritize:

- **Functional Independence:** We teach real-world skills alongside academics to prepare students for life beyond the classroom—at home, in the community, and in the workplace.
- **Integrated Support:** Therapies and interventions are not separate from learning—they are woven into each student's day, so growth is consistent and meaningful.
- **Collaboration:** Families are not just part of the process—they are partners. We work closely with parents, therapists, and other providers to create a team that truly knows and supports the child.
- **Dignity and Respect:** We meet students where they are, without judgment or comparison. Every success—no matter how big or small—is celebrated.

- High Expectations with Realistic Support: We believe in pushing students to do their best, not by demanding more than they can give, but by scaffolding learning in a way that builds confidence and competence.

At Life Skills Academy, we don't just prepare students for the next grade level—we prepare them for life. For some, that may mean learning to count change, use a communication device, or participate meaningfully in daily care. For others, it may mean mastering algebra, building a resume, preparing for college, or learning to live independently.

We understand that every child's path is different, and we believe success looks different for every student. Our role is to walk alongside families to define what meaningful progress looks like *for that child* and then help them get there. Whether a student is working toward full independence or will always require significant support, we tailor our teaching, therapies, and goals to support their potential, their preferences, and their family's vision for the future.

Admissions and Enrollment

Eligibility Criteria

Life Skills Academy is a specialty private school serving students with diverse learning, communication, developmental, medical, and support needs. Although many students have an IEP, medical diagnosis, or other formal documentation, these are not strict requirements for admission. The most important consideration is whether LSA can safely and effectively meet the student's needs within our small-class, resource-rich environment.

Admission decisions are made individually and consider the student's current abilities, support needs, behavior, communication, independence, educational history, and likely fit within an available classroom. Families are expected to provide complete and accurate information about the student's needs, including any history of aggression, elopement, self-injury, toileting difficulties, medical concerns, or previous placement challenges. Withholding or significantly misrepresenting information may affect admission or continued enrollment.

Age Guidelines

Students must be at least 5 years old by September 1 to begin Kindergarten. Students may remain enrolled through the school year in which they turn 22, provided they continue to meet LSA's eligibility requirements and an appropriate program remains available.

Independence and Personal Care

LSA serves students who require varying levels of support; however, students must demonstrate a basic ability to participate in the school environment with the staffing and resources available in their assigned classroom.

Students age 8 and older are generally expected to use the restroom independently unless a physical, neurological, or medical disability prevents this. Younger students who are not yet fully toilet-trained may be admitted when meaningful progress is expected and the school can reasonably support their needs. If a student continues to require a level of personal care that exceeds LSA's staffing capacity, or shows little progress toward greater independence over time, the student's placement may be reassessed.

Behavior and Safe Participation

LSA is not a behavioral treatment school and is not designed to serve students whose primary needs involve severe aggression, dangerous elopement, significant self-injury, or behavior

requiring an intensive level of crisis intervention. Students must be able to participate safely in the school environment with supports appropriate to their classroom placement.

A student with more intensive behavioral needs may be considered for admission when ongoing ABA services and a dedicated Registered Behavior Technician are in place. However, the presence of an RBT does not guarantee admission or continued enrollment. LSA must still determine that the student can be served safely without substantially disrupting the program or requiring a level of support beyond what the school can provide.

If an RBT is required as a condition of enrollment, the student may be required to remain home whenever that support is unavailable, unless LSA approves another arrangement in writing. Families are responsible for maintaining the outside services, authorizations, and agency coordination necessary for the RBT to attend school.

Behavioral concerns that are not disclosed during the admission process, increase significantly, or do not improve through reasonable school-based supports may result in a reassessment of the student's placement.

Continued Eligibility

Admission to LSA is an ongoing determination rather than a one-time decision. Continued enrollment depends on whether the school remains able to safely and appropriately meet the student's educational, behavioral, medical, communication, and personal-care needs.

The student's Individualized Service Plan team reviews progress at least annually and may meet more frequently when concerns arise. The team considers progress toward identified goals, classroom participation, independence, behavior, safety, attendance, support needs, and the effectiveness of available interventions.

A student's eligibility may be reconsidered when their needs change substantially, required supports are no longer available, progress remains limited despite appropriate intervention, safety concerns persist, or the student requires services beyond LSA's staffing, facilities, or program capacity. When possible, LSA will work with the family to identify concerns, establish goals, and allow a reasonable period for improvement before making a final placement decision. In situations involving immediate or serious safety concerns, LSA may take more immediate action.

Any decision regarding continued enrollment will be discussed directly with the family. When LSA determines that it can no longer safely or effectively meet a student's needs, the school may recommend a different setting and may discontinue enrollment.

Scholarship and Financial Aid

We are committed to making Life Skills Academy accessible to as many families as possible. Our financial support structure is designed to be straightforward:

Scholarship First, Parent Responsibility Next

All students who qualify for the Step-Up Scholarships or similar state scholarships will have those funds applied first to their annual tuition bill. Any remaining balance *after scholarships* will be the family's responsibility.

Additional Need-Based Aid through FACTS

Families experiencing financial hardship may apply for further aid through FACTS Management, our third-party aid administrator. This process involves a \$45 application fee, paid directly to FACTS, and **must be renewed each year**. Please note: aid is granted on a first-come, first-served basis and is internally capped (e.g. up to \$4,000 per student, \$6,000 per family).

Unexpected Changes in Finances

We understand that circumstances can change. Open, honest communication is key. If funding issues arise, please contact our Finance Office immediately to explore payment adjustments or temporary arrangements.

Non-Payment Policy

If a family stops paying without communication, this may negatively impact their student's enrollment and ability to attend school. We reserve the right to suspend school attendance until the account is brought current, or formal arrangements have been made.

Supplemental Tuitions

Our base tuition covers small class sizes, integrated therapies, academic instruction, and general support services. However, some students require a level of supervision, care, or individualized instruction that significantly exceeds the standard resources provided. In these cases, additional tuition supplements may be assessed.

These fees help ensure we can provide the staffing, training, and environmental modifications necessary to support students safely and effectively. All supplements are determined based on a comprehensive review of the student's needs and are communicated clearly to families prior to billing. Some students may qualify for more than one supplement.

Please note: Tuition supplements are reviewed annually and may be adjusted if the student's level of need changes.

Toileting Support Supplement

This fee applies to students who are not toilet trained or who require consistent adult assistance in the restroom. This includes students who:

- Wear diapers or pull-ups
- Have frequent accidents in underwear
- Require hands-on help with dressing/undressing, wiping, or staying seated
- Need assistance changing soiled clothing

* A potty schedule or verbal reminders alone do not qualify a student for this supplement.

Modified Curriculum Supplement

This fee applies when a student's academic level is significantly below peers in the same classroom, making group instruction inaccessible. These students require an entirely individualized curriculum. This supplement is automatically applied to all students placed in a "supportive" classroom setting where whole-group academic instruction is not developmentally appropriate.

Assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) Supplement

This supplement applies when a student requires frequent, ongoing, or individualized adult support beyond what is typically provided within the classroom's standard staffing model. Support may be physical, functional, behavioral, or related to the student's ability to participate safely and successfully in daily school routines.

Examples may include:

- Frequent prompting, modeling, redirection, or hands-on assistance to begin, continue, or complete activities
- Significant support with transitions, classroom routines, communication, attention, or participation in non-preferred activities
- Assistance with toileting, dressing, hygiene, feeding, mobility, positioning, or other self-care needs

- Specialized furniture, equipment, or accommodations for mobility or physical access
- Supervision during eating because of choking risk, modified diets, or difficulty feeding independently
- Increased monitoring for safety concerns such as climbing, eloping, wandering, frequent falls, visual impairment, aggression, or limited awareness of danger

Complex Medical Supplement

This fee applies to students with medical needs requiring skilled care or healthcare oversight.

Examples include:

- Ongoing monitoring for conditions such as seizures or diabetes
- Tube feedings, catheterization, or use of medical implants/devices
- Emergency protocols for serious allergies, blood disorders, or chronic illnesses
- Devices that require daily cleaning or supervision (e.g., pacemakers, G-tubes, colostomy bags)

Behavior Support Supplement

This fee applies when a student regularly engages in behavior that requires intervention outside the classroom. Examples of qualifying behavior include:

- Frequent “code orange” calls for behavioral assistance
- Aggression (verbal or physical)
- Property destruction
- Level 2 behaviors (as defined by the school’s behavior management protocol)
- Ongoing high-intensity behaviors such as:
 - Repeated tantrums, screaming, crying
 - Noncompliance, refusal to move or respond
 - Destruction of materials, food-snatching, or other disruptive actions
 - Excessive stimming or vocal tics that interfere with learning

Important Note: If a student is assigned an RBT and attends school on days when the RBT is absent, the behavior supplement will still be charged unless there is a written agreement that the student will stay home in those situations.

Re-enrollment Procedures

Re-enrollment is not automatic. Each spring, current families must complete a series of steps to reserve their child’s spot for the upcoming school year. Because demand for our program is

high and we maintain a growing waitlist, failure to meet deadlines or communicate delays may result in forfeiting your child's seat.

To secure re-enrollment, families must complete all of the following steps:

1. Submit the Intent to Return Form

In early spring, we will send out an Intent to Return survey. This form lets us know if your child plans to return for the upcoming school year. Timely responses help us determine how many new students we can admit.

2. Complete Tuition & Scholarship Requirements

Finalize all financial steps associated with re-enrollment. This includes:

- Renewing any applicable state scholarships (e.g., Step Up)
- Providing your updated Award ID
- Approving enrollment in the EMA system

3. Sign a New Tuition Agreement

You will receive an updated tuition agreement showing your estimated scholarship award, any financial aid, and your selected payment plan.

Important: Re-enrollment is only confirmed once all forms, approvals, and agreements are completed. If you experience delays, please contact our office to discuss extensions or support.

Withdrawal Policy

We understand that family circumstances and educational needs can change. If you decide to withdraw your child from Life Skills Academy, please carefully review the following policy and procedures:

Notice of Withdrawal

To formally withdraw a student from Life Skills Academy, parents/guardians must complete and sign the official Withdrawal Form. This form is available in the school office or by request. Written notice of withdrawal must be provided at least 30 calendar days in advance of the intended withdrawal date.

Tuition & Refunds

If the withdrawal occurs within the first 10 school days of a student's attendance, both scholarship and out-of-pocket tuition payments will be refunded in full. If the withdrawal occurs after the 10th school day, any scholarship-funded tuition is non-refundable. Out-of-pocket

tuition may be refunded on a prorated basis, depending on the student's departure date and provided the withdrawal occurs on good terms and in accordance with this policy.

Student Records

Student records will not be released to another school or program until a signed withdrawal form has been submitted, and the new school either:

- Directly contacts LSA to request records, or
- Parents/guardians provide the full name and contact information of the new school.

Outstanding Obligations

Withdrawal from the school does not release families from any outstanding financial obligations. Final account balances must be settled before records will be transferred.

Communicating with LSA Staff

At Life Skills Academy, we value open and respectful communication between home and school. Keeping lines of communication clear and efficient helps us work together to support your child's success. Below are the best ways to reach out, depending on the nature of your concern:

Contacting Teachers

Classroom teachers are available via ClassDojo chat between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM. Teachers check messages in the morning and again in the afternoon and are expected to respond within 24 hours. While some may choose to reply outside of business hours, please understand this is not expected.

If you have a time-sensitive concern (such as a dismissal change or something urgent that needs a same-day response), please call or text the main office line at (863) 800-0755 instead of relying on Dojo.

Please remember: for any classroom-related concerns, your child's teacher should be your first point of contact.

Contacting the Front Office

For questions related to attendance, early dismissal, transportation changes, forms, records, or general inquiries, please call or text the main office at (863) 800-0755, or email info@LSApolk.org.

Office staff can also help route your question to the right person if you're unsure whom to contact.

Contacting Administration

If you have a concern that was not resolved after speaking with the teacher, or if the concern involves a teacher or other staff member directly, you may request a meeting with the Assistant Principal by calling or texting the front office.

We ask that you do not walk in without an appointment to speak with administration, as we are frequently in classrooms or in meetings and cannot accommodate unscheduled visits. If further

escalation is needed, the Assistant Principal may bring the issue to the attention of the Principal.

If you're unsure who to contact, just describe your concern to the front office and they'll help you get connected to the appropriate person.

Contacting Therapists and Support Staff

For therapy-related questions or concerns, parents may contact their child's treating therapist directly through ClassDojo. For bigger issues, questions about scheduling or progress, or anything needing administrative support, reach out to Geni Cablish, Director of Therapy, by phone at (863) 800-0755 or by text at (863) 774-7714.

Therapists are focused on their caseloads during the school day, so timely responses are more likely when routed through Geni.

If your student participates in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and you have questions about job training, community work, or the career prep program, please contact Jon Brock, Director of Career Development, at (863) 614-2303. However, Jon is not involved in academic or behavioral decisions, and he cannot resolve issues outside of the VR department.

Communication Boundaries

Our business hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM. While you're welcome to send a message outside of these hours, especially for things like reporting an upcoming absence, we may not respond until the next school day unless the matter is urgent. In true emergencies, send a text to the main office line, which is monitored by multiple staff members.

Please help us support your child effectively by following the appropriate communication chain:

For classroom issues: Teacher → Assistant Principal → Principal, as needed.

For therapy: Therapist → Director of Therapy (Geni Cablish).

For vocational issues: Director of Career Development (Jon Brock).

We also ask that all communication remain respectful. We understand that emotions run high when it comes to your child, and we're here to help, but mutual respect and clear communication allow us to work together most effectively.

Language Support

We can provide limited support for Spanish-speaking families. Spanish interpretation is available for ISP meetings, and some front office and therapy staff can assist in Spanish when available. However, **we strongly encourage families to bring their own interpreter for day-to-day conversations**, as we cannot guarantee availability of a bilingual staff member at all times. At this time, we can only accommodate communication in English and Spanish.

Academic Programs

Classroom Grouping and Placement Philosophy

Classroom placement is designed to ensure each student receives instruction, support, and peer interaction in a setting where they can thrive. We do not assign students to classrooms based solely on their chronological grade level. Instead, we consider multiple factors, including cognitive functioning, chronological age and academic and social/emotional readiness, to determine the most appropriate placement:

This approach allows us to group students in a way that supports both their learning and their relationships. Our teachers are experienced in differentiating instruction to meet a wide range of abilities within each classroom. All rooms are multi-grade and flexibly grouped, with common patterns but frequent exceptions depending on individual needs.

Please note that classroom groupings are guidelines, not rigid rules. For instance, a high-functioning second grader who is socially mature might be placed in an older classroom to find more appropriate academic peers. Similarly, a student who is developmentally younger may remain in a lower grouping for additional support.

Placement is also designed with social growth in mind. Many of our students form lasting friendships based on shared interests, similar communication styles, or developmental milestones—not necessarily age or grade alone. Our flexible grouping model supports those relationships and prioritizes each student’s ability to connect with others.

Classroom assignments are reviewed annually and may be adjusted at any time based on a student’s progress, needs, or changes in behavior or independence. Our goal is always to place each child in the least restrictive, most supportive environment where they can grow academically, socially, and emotionally.

Curriculum and Instruction

Our instructional model is built around the principle that exposure, access, and individualized support are essential to meaningful learning. We provide a blend of grade-level content exposure, personalized skill-building, and real-world application, tailored to each student’s strengths, challenges, and goals.

Instructional Approach

All students at LSA, except those in supportive classrooms, receive whole-group instruction using *IXL*, a web-based curriculum aligned to grade-level standards. *We do not expect every student to master this content*—our goal is to expose students to the same material their peers are learning in traditional classrooms. This exposure helps students build background knowledge, expand vocabulary, and participate in conversations with others their age.

Individualized Interventions

In addition to group lessons, all students participate in daily targeted intervention sessions. These sessions focus on mastering specific academic skills, often aligned with goals in the student’s Individualized Service Plan (ISP). Interventions may include one-on-one instruction, small group support, or hands-on learning tailored to the student’s needs.

Supportive vs. Traditional Classrooms

- Supportive classrooms serve students who are still learning foundational skills, such as basic communication, independence, or behavioral regulation. Instruction focuses heavily on life skills, structured routines, and “learning how to learn”. Students in supportive classrooms often require additional adult support, modified materials, and a slower pace.
- Traditional classrooms serve students who are ready to participate in more complex academic content with fewer supports. These students may still have disabilities, but they are able to engage in lessons at a faster pace, handle more independence, and navigate classroom expectations with minimal assistance.

Classroom placement is based on the educational environment in which the student is most likely to make meaningful progress. Some students may move between classroom models as their needs change, while others may remain in a supportive classroom throughout their time at LSA. However, supportive classrooms are available at all levels for students who continue to need that environment.

Field Trips and Community-Based Instruction (CBI)

At Life Skills Academy, we believe learning should extend beyond the classroom. Community-Based Instruction (CBI) is a key part of our program and gives students the opportunity to practice social, communication, and daily living skills in real-world settings.

Elementary School CBI

Our younger students regularly participate in short field trips to nearby community locations, including:

- The local public library
- McKay Gardens
- The neighborhood playground

These outings help children practice age-appropriate social skills, group behavior expectations, and real-life routines such as crossing the street safely, waiting their turn, and engaging appropriately with unfamiliar adults.

High School CBI

Our older students participate in more advanced community experiences, including weekly walks to:

- 7-Eleven or the Dollar Store to practice making purchases
- The public library to increase independence and access community resources

In addition, high school students take part in periodic outings to locations such as:

- Local grocery stores
- College campuses
- Government offices (such as the DMV or post office)

These trips are designed to support functional life skills, increase independence, and prepare students for adulthood by offering structured practice in navigating typical community environments.

Grading

Grades should reflect each student's effort, growth, and the level of support they need to complete tasks. Our grading system is designed specifically for students with exceptional needs, and it emphasizes participation, persistence, and individualized instruction.

Grading Scale

We use a letter grading system that accounts for how much support a student needs:

- **A** – Work completed correctly and independently
- **B** – Work completed mostly correctly with some support
- **C** – Work completed with maximum support
- **D** – Student refused to participate or denied support
- **F** – Student was absent and did not complete the work

Note: Students who are present in class and attempt their work will always receive a grade of A, B, or C. We make sure every student receives the support they need to succeed.

Assignment Titles & Tracking Progress

Teachers track student progress using weekly grades in each subject. Assignments may include classwork, participation, assessments, and projects. Even if lessons are different from student to student, all students are graded based on effort, support needs, and participation.

Make-Up Work Policy

Students with excused absences will be allowed to make up their work within one week for full credit. Students who miss work without an excuse may still complete it, but they will receive partial credit (up to 75%).

Support and Fairness

Every student at Life Skills Academy receives the support they need to access and complete assignments. We adjust our teaching to fit each child's individual learning level and learning style. If you have questions about your child's progress, please contact their teacher to schedule a conference.

Progress Monitoring

At Life Skills Academy, student growth is measured by *individual progress*, not by how closely a student matches grade-level benchmarks. Because our students often start at vastly different academic levels and progress at different rates, we use a personalized approach to track development over time.

In Traditional Classrooms

For students in traditional classrooms, we use IXL, the same web-based program used for daily instruction, to conduct progress monitoring three times per year. These "snapshots" allow us to see how students are performing relative to their previous levels and help identify specific skill gaps for targeted intervention. These assessment periods are marked on the school calendar and occur as follows:

- September – Baseline Snapshot
- January – Mid-Year Progress Monitoring
- May – End-of-Year Snapshot

These assessments measure the student's current skill level across core academic subjects and help determine the pace and direction of future instruction. Teachers use the results to adjust group and individual interventions as needed, ensuring instruction is focused on the right content for each student.

While each student's path is individualized, our general goal is for students to show at least one year of academic growth per school year. This may not correspond to their chronological grade

level. For example, a 4th grader may begin the year working at a 1st-grade reading level and end at a 2nd-grade level—that is meaningful progress, even though they remain “below grade level.”

In Supportive Classrooms

In supportive classrooms, IXL is still used to expose students to grade-level content and build familiarity with academic routines, but the platform often doesn’t accurately reflect the type of progress these students make. Many students in these classrooms have significant intellectual or developmental disabilities that impact how they engage with standardized digital platforms.

For these students, meaningful progress is tracked through:

- ISP goal mastery
- Functional academic skills
- Communication, independence, and daily living skills
- Behavioral growth and classroom participation

Teachers, therapists, and support staff collect qualitative and observational data to measure whether students are learning how to learn: Are they staying engaged for longer periods? Using more language? Following classroom routines? Initiating tasks more independently? That is the kind of progress we’re targeting in our supportive classrooms.

We do not automatically retain students based on whether they have met traditional grade-level standards. Instead, promotion decisions are based on a combination of factors, including:

- Academic progress relative to their own baseline
- Participation and effort
- Social-emotional development
- Age and peer relationships
- Classroom placement fit

Parent Communication

A summary of progress from the IXL snapshots is provided to parents each May. However, parents are welcome to contact the school at any point in the year to discuss their child’s progress in more detail.

Grades for Withdrawn Students

If a student withdraws from Life Skills Academy before the end of a grading period, final grades will be assigned based only on the work completed during their enrollment.

- If a student attends less than half of the quarter and has not completed sufficient work to evaluate progress, the report card will reflect a **"I" (Incomplete)** in place of a grade.
- No failing grades will be issued due to non-attendance after withdrawal.
- Documentation of the student's withdrawal date and attendance duration will be maintained in the student's file.

Teachers are responsible for submitting any partial grades or narrative comments to the administrative office upon withdrawal to support record transfer to the receiving school.

High School Programs

Instructional Tracks

At the high school level, Life Skills Academy organizes students into three instructional tracks based on academic readiness, social-emotional development, life goals, and family input: Academic, Vocational, and Supportive. Placement in a particular track is reviewed regularly and may change based on the student's performance, needs, and transition goals.

Academic Track

Students in the Academic Track are working at or near grade level and are typically on a path to pursue college or post-secondary education after graduation. These students participate in rigorous academic instruction and receive targeted support as needed, but can complete standard coursework with minimal modification.

This track emphasizes independent learning, study skills, and preparation for higher education. Students may also participate in dual enrollment, online electives, or enrichment courses based on availability and readiness.

Vocational Track

The Vocational Track is designed for students who are working significantly below grade level, have limited interest in academic coursework, benefit from a hands-on, practical learning approach, and/or who may struggle with emotional regulation or executive functioning.

The focus of this track is functional academics, job readiness, life skills, and employability. Students in this track learn workplace behaviors, money management, and independent living skills. This track supports students in building a meaningful post-school life, whether through employment, supported living, or continued skill development.

Supportive Track

The Supportive Track at the high school level serves students with the highest level of need. These students typically continue to require intensive support with communication, behavior, personal care, or regulation and benefit from a highly structured environment focused on life skills, daily routines, and personal growth.

Supportive students work on goals outlined in their Individualized Service Plans (ISPs) and may continue in this track as long as they remain eligible for LSA's program. The emphasis is on maximizing independence, communication, and quality of life.

Track Flexibility

Placement in a track is not permanent. Students may move between tracks if their needs or performance change. For example:

- A student in the Supportive Track who gains independence may move to Vocational.
- A Vocational student who matures academically may shift into the Academic Track.
- A student in the Academic Track whose personal goals change from attending college to employability may change to the Vocational Track.

These transitions are made in collaboration with families, staff, and any outside service providers, based on data and observed readiness.

Transition Class

Some students graduate from high school fully ready to begin their adult lives. Others may need a little more time and support before they're ready to navigate the world with independence. For those students, Life Skills Academy offers a Transition Class, a highly individualized program designed to support young adults as they take the final steps toward adulthood.

Who Is Eligible?

Students who have completed all of their diploma requirements may choose to graduate with a standard diploma, or defer graduation and enroll in the Transition Class for continued support.

To be eligible for the Transition Class, students must:

- Have met the minimum credit requirements for graduation (typically 4 years of high school or 18 credits)
- Be under the age of 22
- Continue to benefit from participation in a structured, supportive school environment
- Have an active Individualized Service Plan (ISP) that includes ongoing transition goals

Students who have three years of high school credit may also be considered for early enrollment in the Transition Class if they demonstrate consistent attendance, good effort in academic course work, and success in on-campus and/or off-campus work-based learning experiences.

These students may complete their remaining academic requirements through career and technical education (CTE) coursework and real-world work experience.

Focus of the Transition Year(s)

The Transition Class is not a traditional academic setting. The emphasis is entirely on adult living skills, employability, and community integration. Students in the Transition Class spend their time:

- Participating in extended work-based learning experiences (WBLE)
- Practicing independent living skills such as budgeting, meal planning, scheduling, and using public transportation
- Engaging in community-based instruction and vocational training
- Finalizing their transition goals and building a network of adult service providers

Instruction is individualized based on each student's ISP goals, interests, and strengths. The goal is not just to occupy time, but to make meaningful progress toward independence in the areas that matter most for that student and their family.

Completion of the Transition Program

There is no fixed end date for the Transition Class. Students may remain enrolled until they:

- Achieve their transition goals,
- No longer benefit from the program,
- Reach the maximum age for eligibility (typically 22), or
- Choose to withdraw

We work closely with families and outside agencies during this final phase to ensure that students leave Life Skills Academy with a clear plan for adulthood, including any needed connections to employment, housing, continued education, and adult services.

Diploma Options and Graduation Requirements

All high school students at Life Skills Academy work toward an LSA high school diploma. LSA does not issue a separate certificate of completion based on a student's instructional track. Students in the Academic, Vocational, and Supportive tracks earn the same diploma upon completing LSA's graduation requirements, although the content, complexity, and level of support within their coursework may differ substantially.

LSA's graduation requirements are modeled on Florida's 18-credit Career and Technical Education pathway. To earn a diploma, students must complete the following credits:

- **English Language Arts:** 4 credits
- **Mathematics:** 4 credits, including Algebra I and Geometry

- **Science:** 3 credits, including Biology and another science course with a laboratory component
- **Social Studies:** 3 credits, including World History, U.S. History, U.S. Government and Economics
- **Electives:** 4 credits, up to 2 of which may be earned through approved career, vocational, or work-based learning experiences
-

Academic Standards and Individualized Coursework

Course titles identify the general subject area in which the student received instruction. However, students at LSA have a wide range of abilities, and courses are not taught at one uniform level. Instruction is individualized according to the student's academic readiness, disability-related needs, instructional track, and postsecondary goals.

Students in the Academic Track generally receive instruction based on the major concepts and expectations associated with traditional high school courses. They may receive extensive accommodations, scaffolding, repetition, adjusted pacing, small-group instruction, and alternate ways of demonstrating their knowledge.

Students in the Vocational Track may receive more substantial modifications to the depth, complexity, pace, assignments, assessments, or expected level of mastery within a course. Instruction may emphasize essential concepts and practical or functional applications rather than every standard ordinarily associated with the course in a traditional general education setting.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities, including many students in the Supportive Track, may receive instruction aligned with Florida's Access Points which are alternate academic achievement standards. Access Point instruction focuses on essential academic concepts at reduced levels of complexity and is used when appropriate for the individual student.

Regardless of track, coursework is designed to provide an appropriate level of challenge while supporting progress toward the student's academic, communication, independence, vocational, daily-living, and postsecondary goals.

Course Credits and Transcript Interpretation

LSA uses recognized high school course titles, such as Algebra I, Geometry, Biology, and World History, to identify the primary subject area of instruction and maintain a clear record of credits earned. However, a course title alone should not be interpreted as evidence that the student

mastered every grade-level standard or completed the course at the same level of depth and complexity as a student in a traditional general education program.

The student's transcript, academic records, instructional track, and supporting documentation should be considered together when determining the nature of the coursework completed and the student's readiness for subsequent courses or programs. Additional information about course content and the student's level of performance may be provided to a receiving school upon request.

Graduation Decisions

Graduation is based on the completion of required credits rather than placement in a particular instructional track. Because instruction and expectations are individualized, students may demonstrate successful course completion through traditional academic work, modified assignments and assessments, functional application of course concepts, projects, work-based learning, or other appropriate methods determined by LSA.

Completion of LSA's graduation requirements results in an LSA high school diploma. Life Skills Academy is a private school, and families should understand that receiving schools, colleges, technical programs, scholarship organizations, military programs, employers, and other institutions may establish their own requirements for accepting private-school credits or diplomas. LSA will provide transcripts and supporting documentation to help families explain the student's educational program and pursue appropriate postsecondary opportunities.

Transition Class

Students who have completed their academic credit requirements but continue to benefit from instruction in employment, community participation, communication, independent living, or other transition skills may be considered for LSA's Transition Class. Participation is based on the student's age, continued eligibility, Individualized Service Plan goals, available programming, and the determination that the student continues to benefit from LSA's services.

Post-Graduation Pathways

LSA's high school program is designed to prepare each student for an appropriate next step based on their abilities, interests, support needs, and long-term goals. Because students complete coursework at different levels of depth and complexity, post-graduation options will vary.

Students may pursue employment, supported employment, vocational or technical training, adult education, community-based programs, or college-level study when they meet the eligibility and admission requirements of the receiving organization.

Students whose LSA coursework does not meet the academic preparation or admissions requirements of a traditional college program may choose to pursue a Florida High School Equivalency Diploma by passing the GED examination. A GED may provide an additional pathway for demonstrating high school equivalency and is accepted by many colleges, universities, training programs, employers, and military branches. However, earning a GED does not guarantee admission. Each institution establishes its own admissions, testing, prerequisite, and placement requirements.

LSA works with students and families to identify realistic postsecondary goals and develop transition plans supporting education, employment, independent living, community participation, and adult services.

Therapeutic and Support Services

Individualized Service Plan (ISP)

Every student has an Individualized Service Plan (ISP) that serves as a roadmap for their development across academic, therapeutic, behavioral, and vocational domains. The ISP is the central tool used by the entire team to support the student's unique needs and goals.

What Is an ISP?

The ISP outlines targeted, measurable goals that are tailored to the student's abilities, challenges, and long-term objectives. It includes input from teachers, therapists, support staff, and, when appropriate, the student and their family. Goals are not limited to academics; they may also address:

- Speech, occupational, or physical therapy needs
- Behavioral and emotional regulation
- Social skills and peer interaction
- Toileting, self-care, and life skills
- Pre-vocational and vocational readiness
- Career exploration and independence

ISPs are updated annually, but our team continuously monitors progress and revises goals as needed to reflect the student's growth or changes in ability.

How the ISP Is Used

The ISP directly informs instruction, supports, and services across the school day. Teachers use it to prioritize instruction and scaffold materials. Therapists use it to embed skill-building into the classroom routine. Administrators use it to evaluate eligibility for continued enrollment. In high school, the ISP includes a career readiness section, which grows in importance each year and helps shape participation in the VR program, work-based learning, and postsecondary transition planning.

Family Involvement

Families are active participants in the ISP process. We encourage regular communication, collaboration, and transparency. Parents will be asked to attend at least one formal ISP meeting each year and are welcome to request a review meeting at any time. The more we work together, the better we can tailor supports that actually make a difference.

Transition Planning

Beginning at age 13, each student's ISP includes a Transition Plan—a structured conversation and documentation process that helps prepare the student and their family for life after high school. The goal is to ensure that every student leaves Life Skills Academy with a plan for what comes next and the tools to pursue it.

From this point on, the student is invited to participate in their annual ISP meeting. This helps the team center the conversation around their goals, preferences, and concerns. Families are encouraged to come prepared to talk about long-term plans, even if they feel uncertain or overwhelmed—this is the space to explore those questions.

Topics typically addressed in transition planning include:

- Post-graduation goals: What does the student want to do after high school? College, technical school, employment, supported day programs, or continued training through the LSA Transition Class?
- Guardianship: If the student may need legal guardianship or supported decision-making after turning 18, we help families begin that process early. We explain the different options and assist families with filing the initial legal paperwork.
- Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD): We introduce families to APD and provide guidance on eligibility, available services, and how to apply.
- Living arrangements: Will the student continue living at home or need residential support? This helps guide the development of independent living skills and identify appropriate resources.
- Career interests: We begin discussing vocational goals and aligning school experiences (e.g., VR participation, classroom placement, and work-based learning) with those interests.
- Classroom and high school track placement: In younger years, transition planning focuses on determining the best classroom fit for the next school year and, by the end of middle school, identifying which high school track (Academic, Vocational, or Supportive) may be most appropriate.

These conversations grow deeper and more detailed each year. By the time the student is in high school, the transition section of their ISP becomes one of the most important parts—driving decisions about instruction, services, and supports. It ensures that everything we do at school is connected to the real-world outcomes that matter most to the student and their family.

Therapeutic Services

Life Skills Academy provides access to speech-language, occupational, and physical therapy through two distinct service models:

Medical Model

Therapies delivered under the medical model are funded through private insurance, Medicaid, or self-pay. These sessions typically occur one-on-one in a clinical setting on campus and follow a traditional therapy model:

- 30–60 minute sessions, based on the student’s needs and insurance coverage
- Individualized treatment plans
- Formal re-evaluations every six months
- Documentation submitted to insurers or families for ongoing approval and billing

This model is most appropriate for students who need intensive, direct therapy services and whose families are seeking medical documentation of progress and outcomes.

School-Based Model

The school-based model focuses on a student’s ability to function in the educational environment. The primary goal is to help students develop the skills they need to succeed in school—academically, socially, and functionally.

Within this model, services may be delivered in two primary ways:

Direct Services: These are hands-on interventions where the therapist works directly with the student, either in a pull-out setting (outside the classroom in a quieter environment) or through push-in support (within the classroom alongside teachers and peers). Direct services are typically provided to younger students or those with more significant needs, and they target specific skill development like handwriting, expressive language, sensory regulation, or mobility.

Indirect Services (Consultation): As students develop stronger foundational skills and become more independent, they often transition to consultative support. In this model, the therapist continues to be part of the educational team but does not work directly with the student on a regular schedule. Instead:

- The therapist develops therapeutic goals aligned with the student’s Individualized Service Plan (ISP)
- They meet regularly with the classroom teacher and staff to discuss strategies, modify materials, and review student progress

- They provide training, modeling, and tools for staff to implement interventions throughout the day
- They observe the student as needed to ensure strategies are effective and goals remain appropriate

Consultation services allow the student to practice skills in natural contexts with familiar adults while still benefiting from the expertise of a licensed therapist. This model supports generalization of skills and is often the final stage of therapeutic intervention in a school setting before services are faded entirely.

Collaborative Approach

Regardless of service model, our therapy team functions as an integrated part of the school community. Therapists participate in classroom planning, staff training, and student progress monitoring. Many therapy goals are embedded within a student's Individualized Service Plan (ISP) and are targeted throughout the school day, not just during therapy sessions.

This collaborative approach ensures that therapeutic services are not isolated or separate from the student's educational experience—they are fully woven into the supports that help each child thrive academically, socially, and functionally.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Work-Based Learning

Life Skills Academy partners with Florida's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to help prepare students for adult life by developing employability skills, job readiness, and independence. This support begins in middle school and continues through high school in a carefully scaffolded progression of experiences, guided by each student's Individualized Service Plan (ISP).

Middle School On-the-Job Training (OJT)

Our oldest middle school students begin participating in structured on-campus work experiences we refer to as *On-the-Job Training (OJT)*. These activities are designed to introduce students to the expectations of real work while still in a highly supported environment. Duties may include:

- Tidying up the lunchroom (stacking chairs, sweeping, mopping, wiping tables)
- Taking out trash and replacing liners throughout campus
- Light custodial work
- Practicing teamwork, task initiation, and following multi-step directions

This experience lays the foundation for soft skills like timeliness, personal responsibility, communication, and following routines, all essential for future employment success.

High School OJT and Pre-VR Participation

Students continue OJT during their first year of high school, expanding their responsibilities to include:

- Restroom maintenance
- Vacuuming classrooms and hallways
- Tracking and restocking cleaning supplies

These tasks build consistency and independence while helping determine the student's readiness for off-campus Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE).

At age 14, students become eligible to begin the VR application process. Because approval and onboarding can take up to a year, we begin building skills early so that once enrollment is complete, students are well-prepared for their community-based job placements.

Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE)

Students typically begin off-campus WBLEs during their second year of high school, when they are more socially and emotionally ready. Placements vary based on student interests, strengths, and transportation feasibility, and may include retail, food service, office work, or light industrial support roles.

The goal of the WBLE program is to build career readiness—not to secure full-time employment by graduation. Through real-world job experiences, students develop soft skills, workplace habits, and confidence that make them more attractive candidates in the job market after high school. Participation is closely supervised and supported by LSA staff and VR providers, with ongoing coaching and feedback to improve independence and employability over time.

Career Planning on the ISP

From ninth grade onward, each student's Individualized Service Plan (ISP) includes a dedicated *Career Planning* section. This part of the ISP outlines:

- The student's long-term employment goals
- Strengths and barriers to success
- Progress in soft skills, work habits, and technical competencies
- Notes on VR participation and performance in work experiences

We work closely with families and VR counselors to ensure each student's transition plan reflects realistic, person-centered goals aligned with their preferences, abilities, and future vision.

Behavior and Conduct Framework

Positive Behavior Philosophy

Supporting student behavior starts with the belief that all behavior is a form of communication—and that every child is capable of learning appropriate, functional ways to express themselves. Our approach to behavior is rooted in the principles of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), which focus on understanding the *why* behind a behavior and using that information to teach more appropriate alternatives.

Rather than relying on punishment or exclusion, we emphasize proactive strategies designed to prevent challenging behaviors before they happen. This includes setting clear expectations, providing visual and verbal supports, reinforcing positive behaviors, teaching self-regulation skills, and modifying the environment to meet the student's needs. We also place a strong focus on *skill-building*, not just compliance. Our goal is to equip students with the tools they need to manage their emotions, solve problems, and function independently in both school and community settings.

We recognize that many of our students have experienced environments where their behaviors were misunderstood, mislabeled, or handled punitively. At LSA, we aim to do better. We believe that all students, regardless of disability, deserve dignity, understanding, and access to meaningful instruction—not just academically, but socially, emotionally, and behaviorally as well.

When behavioral challenges occur, our team works collaboratively—pulling in teachers, therapists, paraprofessionals, and families—to analyze the function of the behavior, develop targeted supports, and implement consistent, compassionate interventions.

Behavior supports and strategies

Helping students develop positive, prosocial behaviors is a team effort—one that requires consistency, training, and a clear plan. Our school uses a layered approach that combines universal supports with targeted interventions for students who need more individualized assistance.

Staff receive behavior management training before the school year begins and continue to receive coaching and support throughout the year. We also have a full-time Behavior Support

Specialist whose job is to monitor behavior schoolwide, identify students who are struggling, and consult with teachers on individualized strategies. This allows us to respond quickly and appropriately before problems escalate.

In addition, we partner with multiple local ABA agencies to help connect students with one-on-one behavior therapy. Because of our established relationships with these providers, our students are often able to begin receiving services more quickly than they would through traditional referral pathways.

Some common strategies used across classrooms include:

- **Planned ignoring** of minor attention-seeking behaviors
- **Pivot praise**, which reinforces desired behavior in peers
- **Behavior contracts** or point sheets that make expectations and rewards explicit
- **Classroom visuals** that reinforce routines and rules
- **Calm-down tools and designated break areas** to support self-regulation

On a schoolwide level, students earn “Behavior Bucks” for positive choices, which they can spend at our Behavior Store on Fridays. This system promotes intrinsic motivation and helps students connect behavior with outcomes in a concrete way.

When it comes to communicating with families about behavior, we aim to be thoughtful and strategic. We do not report every behavioral incident home by default. In part, this is to avoid overwhelming families with negatives, but it’s also because we believe in handling school-based behavior at school. If a student is struggling, they may lose out on rewards or privileges, but they are not subjected to double punishment when they go home. If families desire more frequent updates, we’re happy to make that happen—but we usually recommend a meeting first to agree on what information will be shared, how often, and for what purpose.

Crisis Management

Our school uses Professional Crisis Management (PCM) as our crisis intervention system. PCM is a comprehensive, evidence-based training program that equips staff with tools for the prevention, de-escalation, and safe physical management of behavioral crises. The primary goal of PCM is to maintain safety and dignity for all students while minimizing the use of physical interventions whenever possible.

Only staff who have completed the full PCM certification are authorized to use physical interventions, and hands-on strategies are always a last resort. Physical intervention is only used when a student's behavior presents a clear and immediate danger to themselves or others, or causes significant disruption to the learning environment. PCM refers to these behaviors using the acronym **CASH**:

- **C**ontinuous:
- **A**ggression and/or
- **S**elf-injurious behavior and/or
- **H**igh-magnitude disruption

If a situation meets any of the above criteria, and all other strategies have failed or are deemed insufficient, trained staff may use manual restraint to ensure safety. When this occurs, parents will be notified the same day. The notification will include a complete account of the incident: what occurred, why the intervention was used, the duration of the restraint, any injuries or marks left (if any), how the student recovered, and what steps will be taken to prevent similar situations in the future.

We want families to understand that manual restraint is not a regular occurrence at Life Skills Academy. Most students never require it. When it does happen, it's handled with professionalism, compassion, and transparency. If a student requires frequent restraint, it typically indicates that the school setting is not meeting that student's needs, and we may begin discussions with the family about more appropriate alternatives.

Tiered Intervention System for Major Behaviors

We recognize that children with disabilities may exhibit challenging behaviors. Our staff are trained to prevent, manage, and address these behaviors through various strategies. However, when behavior becomes unsafe or highly disruptive, or does not respond to our strategies, we will implement the following procedures:

Level 1

Interventions

Teachers must collect data on the behaviors before and during the intervention. Parents will first be notified in writing of the concerning behaviors, and a parent meeting must take place within 5 days of written notice. During this meeting, the parents are given LSA's intervention plan, with a follow-up meeting scheduled in 3 weeks. After 3 weeks, the student may be given another plan, moved to half-days, or dismissed. This is the only level where students may be

given time to remediate behaviors before parent contact and the initiation of the procedure, depending on factors such as the age of the student and the nature of their disability.

Behaviors Include:

- High magnitude disruption
- Highly disruptive or inappropriate self-stimulatory behavior (stimming)
- Repeated risky/dangerous behaviors, regardless of intent to harm
- Repeated bullying behavior
- Continuous or repeated non-compliance (not risky or aggressive)
- Continuous, intentional minor damage to property or accidental major damage resulting from risky behavior
- Repeated elopement from the classroom
- Crisis behaviors (other than level 2 behaviors) requiring the PCM manual restraint.
- Repeated minor self-injury or threats of major self-injury
- Chronic attendance issues, including absences or leaving school early/arriving late
- Chronic misuse of personal or school devices

Level 2

Interventions

Out-of-school suspension pending a meeting/plan. Non-compliance with the plan, repetition of the behavior, or occurrence of another behavior on the level 2 or level 3 list will result in immediate dismissal from the school.

Behaviors Include:

- Credible threats of major harm to students or staff
- Physical aggression towards other students or staff, with no injury or minor injury
- Bringing a dangerous object to school without threats or intent to harm (e.g., pocketknife, lighter)
- Elopement (successful or attempted) from the school building
- Intentional major damage to school property or student property
- Use of personal or school devices on school premises to:
 - Access or send pornography
 - Harass/bully/threaten other students or staff
 - Participate in academic dishonesty (cheating)
 - Record other students or staff without permission
- Graphic sexual language/gestures or inappropriate touching/groping of self or another student

Level 3

Interventions

Immediate dismissal from the school.

Behaviors Include:

- Intentionally causing major injury to a staff member or another student
- Bringing a weapon to school with intent to harm other students or staff
- Attempting to take their own life at school or intentionally causing major bodily harm to themselves
- Elopement off school property
- Possession, use, or sale of illegal drugs on school premises
- Engaging in sexual activity with another student on school premises

These levels provide general guidance and do not require LSA to follow identical timelines or consequences in every case. Administration may accelerate, modify, repeat, or bypass steps based on the seriousness of the incident, the student's disability, immediate safety concerns, prior history, the effectiveness of available interventions, and LSA's ability to safely meet the student's needs.

Technology and Digital Behavior

Classroom Technology Policy

Students are provided with school-issued devices to support their learning and develop essential digital literacy skills. Elementary 1 and supportive classrooms use tablets, while students in Elementary 2 and up receive a small laptop computer. Devices are assigned individually and stay on campus at all times.

Each student is also issued a Microsoft 365 account to access tools such as Outlook, Teams, Word, and PowerPoint. Students are expected to create and remember a secure password. This is treated as a life skill and supported accordingly. For students using laptops, their Microsoft 365 credentials are also used to log into their school-issued device.

All school laptops are pre-configured with security settings that limit the student's ability to alter, download, or modify the device in any way. While these security settings are strong, no system is foolproof. Any attempt to bypass security settings, download unauthorized software, or "hack" the device is considered a serious violation of school policy. Similar rules apply to the use of classroom smartboards, which are essentially large touch-screen devices intended for instructional use only. Students are not permitted to interact with smartboards unless directed by staff and should never attempt to access the system settings or install software.

Consequences for Technology Misuse

Any intentional misuse, tampering, or attempt to bypass school-installed restrictions on a device or smartboard will result in disciplinary action. This may include loss of device privileges, detention, in-school suspension, or more serious consequences depending on the nature of the violation. Repeated or severe violations will be escalated to school administration.

If a student intentionally damages or destroys their school-issued device, families will be charged a \$200 replacement fee.

Students are expected to treat all school technology with care and respect. This includes not only their assigned devices but any shared equipment in the classroom such as smartboards and accessories like keyboard, mouse and headphones. As with any responsibility, misuse or carelessness can result in the loss of access and additional consequences

Internet Use and Safety

Life Skills Academy provides filtered internet access to support academic instruction and promote responsible digital behavior. All students are expected to use the internet in a safe, respectful, and educational manner while on campus.

We maintain several Wi-Fi networks. Students are only authorized to connect to the designated student or personal device (PD) networks. These networks are heavily restricted to block access to inappropriate, distracting, or non-educational content, including, but not limited to, social media platforms, gaming sites, AI tools, and adult material.

Under no circumstances may students connect to the staff Wi-Fi network. This network is unrestricted and intended exclusively for employee use. Any student found connected to the staff network will face disciplinary consequences.

Even on the restricted networks, some students may attempt to bypass filters or access blocked content. These actions are strictly prohibited. Any attempt to visit inappropriate or restricted sites, whether successful or not, will result in disciplinary action. Sharing such content with others, whether by messaging, airdropping, or any other method, is considered a more serious offense and will carry more serious consequences.

While at school, and especially when using school-issued devices, students are expected to access only the websites or programs approved by their teacher. This includes both during instructional time and during free time. Devices are for learning first and foremost, and staff will actively supervise internet activity to ensure students stay on task.

The internet is a powerful tool for education, but with that comes responsibility. Students who misuse it may lose access to devices or networks and may face further disciplinary action depending on the severity of the behavior.

Social Media

Social media use is not permitted during the school day. At the primary school campus, this is a non-issue: students are not allowed to bring personal devices, and our internet network restricts access to all major social platforms. However, on the high school campus, students *are* allowed to bring personal devices. If they choose to access social media using their own cellular data, we do not have the technical means to stop them—though it is still not allowed during school hours.

More often than not, the social media problems we encounter don't happen during school—they happen at home, at night, and on the weekends. Unfortunately, these problems tend to follow students to school and cause disruptions here. We frequently deal with situations where students argue, harass each other, or claim to be threatened based on something that took place on Discord, Snapchat, Instagram or another platform outside of school hours. These situations often escalate quickly and become emotional for both students and parents. Often, the first we hear about a social media issue is when a parent arrives at school in crisis mode, demanding an immediate meeting. By that point, the situation has typically been building online for days or weeks, and the student is now refusing to come to school or is too distraught to function in class.

Here's what families need to know:

- **We cannot regulate what students do on social media outside of school.** If your child is being bullied, threatened, or harassed online, this is a law enforcement matter—not a school matter. We strongly encourage you to screenshot any concerning content and report it to your local police department.
- **We do want to know** if your child is being impacted by online conflict so that we can keep students separated and reduce the potential for conflict during the school day. We are here to support your child while they are in our care—but we cannot take responsibility for what happens after hours on apps we do not control.
- **We have taken reasonable steps** to limit access to social media on campus. We have banned personal devices at the primary school and restricted our Wi-Fi networks across both campuses. Our staff monitors school-issued devices and intervenes if misuse is discovered.

We urge all families to actively supervise their child's use of phones, apps, and social media accounts. Many of the issues we see can be avoided with consistent adult oversight and clearer limits at home. If your child is not emotionally mature enough to handle social media responsibly, it is your right—and your responsibility—as a parent to restrict their access.

Cell Phone and Personal Electronic Devices Policy

To maintain a focused and respectful learning environment, Life Skills Academy places clear limits on students' use of personal electronic devices during the school day. This includes cell phones, smartwatches, tablets, video game consoles and personal laptops.

At the **primary campus**, students are not allowed to have personal electronic devices in their possession at any time for any reason. If a student brings a device to school, it must be turned in to the front office upon arrival and will be returned at dismissal.

At the **high school campus**, students may bring personal devices to school, but they must be silenced and kept out of sight during instructional time. Use during breaks or non-instructional periods may be allowed with staff permission. However, students may not bring personal laptops or computers to school. All high school students are issued a secure, school-managed laptop, and they are expected to use that device for all academic work.

Students are responsible for the care and safety of any personal items they bring to school. Life Skills Academy is not liable for lost, stolen, or damaged devices.

Inappropriate use of electronic devices—including using them to cheat, bully, share or view inappropriate content, record others without permission, or exchange devices between students—will result in disciplinary consequences. Misuse is handled progressively: a first offense typically results in confiscation until the end of the day; a second offense requires a parent meeting to retrieve the device; repeated violations may lead to more serious consequences as determined by school administration.

Exceptions to this policy may be granted on a case-by-case basis for students with medical or accessibility needs. These must be approved in advance by school administration, and documentation may be required.

Health and Safety

School Illness Policy

This policy not only ensures the well-being of individual students but also helps prevent the spread of illnesses throughout the school community.

Children displaying the following symptoms will be sent home from school:

- **Fever:**
 - A fever of 100.4°F or higher indicates illness.
 - Children must be fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication before returning to school.
- **Stomach Virus:**
 - Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea.
 - Children must be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to school.
- **Pinkeye (Conjunctivitis):**
 - Children with red eyes, discharge, or difficulty opening eyes should stay home.
 - Those using medication for bacterial infection must stay home for 24 hours.
 - Return when eyes are slightly pink with clear discharge.
- **Cough:**
 - Minor coughs are generally fine, but persistent or severe coughing warrants staying home.
 - Practice good cough hygiene and handwashing.
- **Strep Throat:**
 - Child must be on antibiotics for 24 hours before returning to school.
- **Head Lice:**
 - Immediate home treatment is recommended.
 - Child should not return until nits are no longer present in the hair.

Medication Policy

Life Skills Academy (LSA) supports students who require medication during the school day. To ensure the safety of all students, we have specific procedures in place for storing and administering medications.

If a student needs medication at school, parents must first return the *Authorization to Administer Medication* form. This form must be signed by the doctor who prescribed the medication and returned to the school before any medication can be given.

All medications must be brought to school in the original prescription bottle, clearly labeled with the student's name, dosage, and exact instructions for administration. Medication cannot be sent back and forth daily; once checked in, it must remain at school until it is no longer needed or until the end of the school year. Medication is stored securely in a locked cabinet and checked in and out by school staff.

Middle and high school students are permitted to carry their own inhaler if the school has written permission from both the parent and the prescribing physician. All other medications must be handled by school staff including over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen and acetaminophen.

At the end of the school year, a parent or guardian must come to the school in person to pick up any remaining medication. We will not send medication home in a student's backpack. If medication is not picked up within a reasonable time, the school will dispose of it according to proper safety procedures.

Parents are responsible for keeping track of their child's medication supply and providing timely refills as needed. Any changes to a student's medication or dosage must be reported to the school immediately, along with an updated authorization form.

Medical Needs and Complex Health Conditions

Life Skills Academy is committed to supporting students with medical conditions that require ongoing care, monitoring, or emergency response during the school day. While we are not a medical facility, we have the training and staffing to accommodate many complex health needs, including (but not limited to) seizure disorders, diabetes, catheterization, feeding tubes, and other specialized care routines.

It is the parent or guardian's responsibility to report all relevant medical information to the school as early as possible—ideally before the school year begins or immediately upon diagnosis. Additionally, we will ask for updated health information each year during your child's Individualized Support Plan (ISP) meeting.

Certain documentation and supplies are mandatory for students with specific medical needs:

- Students with seizure disorders must have a doctor-provided Seizure Action Plan on file and an appropriate rescue medication stored at school.
- Students with life-threatening allergies are required to have a current EpiPen or equivalent emergency medication available at school.
- Other emergency medications or medical equipment may be required based on the student's condition and needs, at the discretion of school leadership and in consultation with the child's healthcare provider.

In some cases, the school may determine that certain safety-related equipment is necessary during the school day to reduce risk. For example, we may require the use of a wheelchair for a student at high risk of falls, or a helmet for a student with frequent drop seizures.

All required medications and equipment must be supplied by the parent and kept up to date. Failure to provide the required medical items may result in the student being unable to attend school until their health and safety needs can be met.

Our priority is to provide a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for every student. Please reach out to the school office if you have any questions or need assistance coordinating care for your child.

School Policies and Procedures

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

To ensure student safety and minimize disruptions, LSA has designated specific drop-off and pick-up locations based on the time of day and method of transportation.

Morning Drop-Off:

Students arriving between 7:00 AM and 8:00 AM should enter through the main office door for morning care in Gardner Hall, which requires a separate fee. Between 8:00 AM and 8:30 AM, students may be dropped off under the carport. Staff will escort them either to the cafeteria (if they've brought breakfast) or to the Sandlot for morning recess. After 8:30 AM, all students must enter through the main office and check in at the front desk to be marked present and escorted to class.

Early Pick-up

If a student needs to leave before the end of the school day, a parent or guardian must come to the main office to sign them out in person. Students will only be released to individuals listed on the authorized pick-up form, and all individuals must present valid photo identification. Early pick-up is not permitted after 2:45 PM. After that time, all families must use the regular dismissal car line.

Students who are 18 or older may be allowed to check themselves out of school only if both the student and their parent or legal guardian have completed and signed a self-checkout authorization form. Without this form on file, the standard check-out procedures still apply.

Afternoon Pick-Up:

At dismissal time (3:05–3:35 PM), car riders will exit through the carport doors, while van riders will be escorted by staff to their designated vehicles. Students who are staying for aftercare will be dismissed through the visitor entrance near the main office. After care service also carries an additional fee.

Any changes to your child's transportation routine must come directly from a parent or guardian, not the student. Please notify the front office or your child's teacher in advance so we can make sure they get where they need to go safely. We cannot rely on messages sent through students.

Kindergarten Arrival Policy

To support a smooth and predictable morning routine, all kindergarten students must arrive by 8:45 AM. Students who arrive after this time will not be admitted to school unless the family has notified administration in advance and the late arrival is due to an approved reason, such as a doctor's appointment.

Unscheduled late arrivals are disruptive to classroom structure and make it more difficult for young students to transition into the school day. Excessive or habitual tardiness may result in a required parent conference and could impact a student's continued enrollment.

Attendance Policy

Consistent attendance is one of the strongest predictors of student success. Our students rely on daily access to modified curriculum, small-group instruction, therapy services, behavioral support, and creative learning strategies. Missing school disrupts access to these interventions and often leads to slow or stalled progress.

Legitimate Absences

We understand that some students have disabilities or medical conditions that result in frequent or extended absences. To help us provide appropriate support, families must contact school administration when:

- A student is absent 2 or more days in a row
- A student is absent 3 or more days within a 2-week period
- A student is frequently leaving early, or leaves early more than once in a week

Absences are considered excused when supported by a doctor's note or approved in advance by the Principal or Assistant Principal.

Make-Up Work

Students with excused absences will be given up to one week to complete missed work for full credit. Students with unexcused absences may still complete assignments, but the maximum score allowed will be 75%.

At-home work packets are not routinely provided. Most LSA students require direct instruction, prompting, and in-the-moment support. Packets often place an unreasonable burden on teachers and typically do not result in meaningful learning. Additionally, offering this option freely encourages absenteeism.

In rare cases (e.g., scheduled surgeries), and only with significant advance notice, limited take-home materials may be provided on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the administration.

Chronic Absenteeism and Truancy

If a student misses more than 10 days in a quarter, excused or unexcused, they will be considered chronically truant, and LSA will initiate a Truancy Intervention Protocol, which includes:

- A required meeting with administration and support staff
- A review of academic and therapeutic progress
- An Attendance Improvement Plan

The Truancy Intervention Protocol is triggered by absences *for any reason*; however, we recognize that exceptional circumstances may arise. In rare cases, we may allow additional absences on a case-by-case basis if the family works closely with the school, provides appropriate documentation, and the student continues to make adequate progress.

If attendance does not improve after implementation of the Truancy Intervention Protocol, the student will be subject to dismissal from the program. Dismissal may occur under either of the following conditions:

- The student accumulates 20 or more absences in a single quarter, or
- The student meets the criteria for the Truancy Intervention Protocol in three consecutive quarters.

LSA reserves the right to dismiss a student sooner if attendance concerns significantly hinder progress and compromise the integrity of the program.

***Please note that kindergarten students must arrive by 8:45 AM or will not be admitted without prior approval. See the Daily Procedures section for more details.*

Grade Promotion and Retention Policy

This policy outlines the criteria and process for promoting students to the next grade level, ensuring that each student's academic progress is appropriately assessed and supported.

Instructional Approach

We are committed to providing a balanced educational experience that addresses both the student's grade-level curriculum and their individual learning needs. To achieve this:

1. **Grade-Level Exposure:** Every student will be exposed to curriculum and instructional material at or near their designated grade level. This exposure aims to familiarize students with age-appropriate academic content.
2. **Targeted Skill Instruction:** Recognizing that many students may have specific skill deficits, additional instruction will be provided at the student's functional working level. This instruction will focus on developing the skills that are lacking, even if they are several grades below the student's current grade level.

Grading and Assessment

Student performance will be evaluated based on their engagement and success with the instructional material, taking into account necessary accommodations and modifications. Report card grades will reflect the student's performance on both grade-level and working-level tasks. Students with satisfactory progress as measured by their report card grades will be promoted to the next grade level.

Retention Criteria

Students will be considered for retention if they receive failing grades in three or more graded subjects. Retention decisions will be made with careful consideration of the student's overall progress, the nature of their disabilities, and their readiness for the next grade level.

Special Considerations

The decision to promote or retain a student will also involve input from teachers, specialists, and parents/guardians. All relevant factors, including social, emotional, and academic growth, will be taken into account.

Dress Code Policy

The dress code policy aims to create a safe, respectful, and distraction-free learning environment while allowing students to express their individuality through their attire.

General Guidelines

- **Appropriateness:** All clothing must be appropriate for a school setting. Clothing should not be revealing and must always cover undergarments.
- **Footwear:** Shoes must be worn. For safety reasons, slippers, flip-flops, and any shoes with wheels are not permitted.
- **Headwear:** Hoods, and sunglasses are not to be worn inside school buildings unless for religious or medical reasons.

- Graphics and Wording: Clothing must not display offensive, vulgar, or discriminatory language or images, nor should it promote drugs, alcohol, tobacco, violence, or illegal activities.
- Gang-Related Attire: Gang-related clothing, symbols, or accessories are strictly prohibited.

Specific Provisions

- Tops:
 - Shoulders must be covered by at least two inches of fabric.
 - No strapless tops, spaghetti straps, or halter tops.
 - Midriffs must be covered.
 - No sheer or see-through clothing.
- Bottoms:
 - Shorts, skirts, and dresses must extend to at least mid-thigh.
 - No excessively ripped or torn clothing that reveals undergarments.
- Outerwear:
 - Hooded sweatshirts may be worn, but hoods must remain down on campus.
- Accessories:
 - Jewelry and accessories should not pose a safety risk or cause distractions.
 - Wallet chains, spiked jewelry, or other potentially dangerous accessories are not permitted.
- Therapy:
 - Only tennis shoes may be worn during therapy sessions.

Enforcement and Consequences

- First Offense: The student will be asked to change into appropriate attire. If necessary, parents will be contacted to bring suitable clothing.
- Second Offense: The student will receive a warning and a meeting with a school counselor or administrator.
- Subsequent Offenses: Repeated violations may result in further disciplinary actions, including detention, suspension, or other appropriate measures.

Exceptions

Any exceptions to the dress code for medical, religious, or cultural reasons must be approved by the school administration in advance.

Drug and Weapon Policy

Our institution is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all students, faculty, and staff. The presence of drugs and weapons on campus poses a serious threat to this environment. This policy outlines our expectations, prevention strategies, enforcement measures, and support systems related to drugs and weapons.

Definitions:

- **Drugs:** Includes illegal drugs, prescription medications without a valid prescription, over-the-counter drugs used inappropriately, and any other substances that alter the mental or physical state.
- **Weapons:** Includes firearms, knives, explosives, and any other items designed or used to inflict harm or intimidation.

Prohibited Conduct:

- **Drug-Related Conduct:**
 - Possession, use, distribution, or sale of illegal drugs.
 - Misuse of prescription or over-the-counter medications.
 - Use of a controlled substance such as nicotine products or alcohol.
 - Being under the influence of drugs while on campus or during school-sponsored activities.
- **Weapon-Related Conduct:**
 - Possession, use, or distribution of weapons on campus or during school-sponsored activities.
 - Threatening or harming others with a weapon.

Enforcement:

- **Search and Seizure:** The school reserves the right to conduct searches of personal property, lockers, and vehicles on school premises if there is reasonable suspicion of drug or weapon possession.
- **Reporting:** Students and staff are encouraged to report any suspicions or knowledge of drug or weapon possession to school authorities.

Consequences:

- **Drug Violations:**
 - **First Offense:** Notification of parents/guardians, and mandatory meeting.
 - **Subsequent Offenses:** Suspension or expulsion, and referral to law enforcement if applicable.

- **Weapon Violations:**
 - Immediate suspension pending investigation.
 - Possible expulsion and referral to law enforcement.

Personal Belongings Policy

Students are not allowed to bring toys, games, or personal items from home to school unless specifically requested by a teacher for a classroom activity or reward.

Bringing toys to school can cause distractions, lead to conflicts between students, and increase the risk of items being lost or broken. This includes, but is not limited to: action figures, dolls, trading cards, toy cars, stuffed animals, fidget toys (unless approved as part of a behavior or sensory plan), and electronic games.

Other items specifically banned include blankets, pillows or comfort items, live animals or pets and personal electronics (including speakers, headphones, smart watches, video game consoles, etc) unless required by the student's ISP or for health reasons.

If a student brings a toy or personal item without permission, it may be confiscated and held by school staff until a parent or guardian is able to retrieve it.

Transportation Policy

Life Skills Academy (LSA) offers transportation to and from school for a monthly fee. We also provide free transportation to and/or from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs.

Hub Stop Model

LSA uses a *hub stop* system for student pick-up and drop-off. Rather than offering door-to-door transportation, we designate central locations in the community that are a safe and reasonable distance from multiple students' homes. These hub stops are chosen with safety in mind—for both the van and the students—and are intended to streamline our routes while maintaining accessibility.

Families are expected to arrive at least 10 minutes before the scheduled stop time. Because the van travels across a wide area, it cannot arrive at each stop at an exact time. Drivers are not permitted to wait for late arrivals. If a student is not present when the van arrives, the van will proceed with its route.

Daily Communication Expectations

If your child will not be riding the van on any given day (AM or PM), you must notify the school office by calling or texting the main school phone line as soon as possible. This helps us maintain an efficient route and ensures the safety of all riders. Poor communication, repeated “no shows,” or habitual lateness to drop-off or pick-up may result in a temporary or permanent suspension from transportation services.

Payment Requirements

To reserve a seat on the van, the first month’s transportation fee must be paid before the first day of school. Ongoing monthly payments are due by the last Friday of the month prior. For example, October’s fee must be paid by the last Friday in September.

Transportation will not be provided if the current month’s payment has not been received. If payment is late, the student will be temporarily suspended from van service until the balance is paid. After three business days without payment, the student’s seat may be released and given to a family on the waitlist.

Conduct and Behavior

Students must follow all safety rules and expectations while riding the van. Disruptive, unsafe, or disrespectful behavior may result in suspension or removal from van service. Families are expected to support staff in reinforcing appropriate behavior.

Additionally, three “no call, no show” absences may result in suspension from transportation services. Refunds will not be issued for days missed due to behavior issues, poor communication, or missed stops.

Student Rights and Legal Disclosures

Life Skills Academy complies with all state and federal laws that protect the rights, safety, and privacy of our students and their families. We want parents to feel confident that their child's information is handled with care and that our school operates in full transparency with all legal and ethical standards. These include:

- **FERPA** (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act): Your child's educational records are confidential. We will only share information with authorized individuals.
- **HIPAA** (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act): If your child receives medical or therapy services, we keep their health information private and secure.
- **Mandated Reporting**: All staff are required by law to report any suspected abuse or neglect to the Florida Department of Children and Families.
- **Nondiscrimination**: We do not discriminate based on race, religion, disability, gender, or background.
- **State Oversight**: As a private school participating in state scholarship programs, we are subject to regular compliance reviews by the Florida Department of Education and Department of Health. We meet all compliance requirements set by these agencies.

Please contact us if you have any questions about your rights or our policies.

Acknowledgment of Student Handbook

We acknowledge that every student has unique needs and abilities. The code of conduct aims to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where all students can thrive. By working together, we can ensure a positive and enriching educational experience for everyone.

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ **Date:** _____