

**Anchorage School District: Life Skills Program**  
*A Guide for Substitute Special Education TAs*

Thank you for your interest being a substitute Special Education Teaching Assistant (TA) in one of our Life Skills classrooms! As a substitute TA, you will make a positive contribution and be instrumental in supporting our schools, staff, and students. We believe that all students deserve the opportunity to achieve his or her potential in a safe and effective learning environment. We are well aware that without the services you provide we would not be able to continue with the district's mission of educating all students for success in life!

The purpose of this handout is to provide you with an overview of the program and to increase your knowledge base so that you are best prepared to provide support and assistance. Feel free to contact the Special Education Department at 742-6021 if you have further questions.

**Program Overview**

The Life Skills Program incorporates a variety of teaching strategies, environmental supports, and curricula to support students in developing functional academic, communication, social, and independent living skills. These students with significant disabilities (such as cognitive disabilities, autism, and health impairments) typically require continuous care throughout the day provided by special education staff.

The Life Skills self-contained classrooms are located in neighborhood schools in regional locations throughout the district. Students could have inclusion opportunities to access specials and electives such as Art, Music, PE, Library, and Health with supervision from teacher assistants. Self-help and adaptive living skills training are embedded throughout the day in various school and community settings. Students receive individualized adult support with functional academics and are typically working on alternate grade level expectations. Students are typically on the non-diploma tract.

**Student Population**

When subbing in a Life Skills classroom, you will be working with and supporting students with a variety of developmental delays. For example, you may notice the following:

➤ *Individual Student Schedules*

Students in the Life Skills program may have an individual schedule used regularly by the school team. The schedule is individualized based on the student's developmental level/skill and provides the student with a meaningful visual system to promote flexibility and independence.

➤ *Individual Education Program*

Students in the Life Skills program will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet their unique needs. Students may also have a behavior intervention plan or individualized matrix, which indicates their preferences, sensory needs, levels of support, and individualized plan for meaningful activities.

➤ *Visual Supports*

Students in the Life Skills program may have a variety of visual supports/materials in place to support learning and communication, such as individualized work systems/schedules, labeled classroom and school locations/objects, visual cue cards, first/then, “to do” list, or routines/sequences.

➤ *Community Based Instruction*

An element of effective programming for students in the Life Skills classroom often includes Community Based Instruction (CBI), which are hands-on, functional, and meaningful activities within community environments that encourage the development of necessary life skills.

➤ *Communication Systems*

Students in the Life Skills program may use individualized communication systems throughout the day, allowing them to effectively express and understand communication. This might include systems such as a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) or a Speech-Generating Device.

➤ *Medical Supports*

Students in the Life Skills program may have a medical need/diagnosis and Individual Health Care Plan. The plan outlines medical orders for all procedures (G-Tubes, Suctioning, diets, etc.).

### **Typical Duties of a Substitute Special Education TA**

- Provide services or support for students individually or in small groups (e.g., planning and implementing accommodations & modifications or behavioral interventions) as directed by special education teachers.
- Assist students to and from the bus.
- Prepare instructional materials including assistive technology devices for student use.
- Collect data and information on a student’s functioning for IEP goals and objectives.
- Attend to and provide for student’s daily hygiene, personal, and health-related care including dressing, feeding, and/or toileting/diapering.
- Assist in positioning/range of motion tasks for students such as lifting, repositioning, physically assisting, and transferring between apparatus.
- Assume safety responsibilities for students if providing community-based instruction.
- Provide support in special education or regular education classroom environments. You may be

asked to provide additional support in other school settings per individual student need, such as assistance/monitoring during lunch periods, breaks, and recesses.