



# Student Handbook

Updated September 2009

# *Welcome to The Literacy Project!*

Congratulations on taking the step to return to school. We are excited about working with you!

This handbook will tell you what you can expect from the program, and what we expect from you. It will describe your rights and responsibilities as a student, and the policies of The Literacy Project.

You may ask your teacher to review this handbook with you.

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.	Introduction .....	1
	Who We Are .....	1
	What We Teach .....	1
	Who Can Attend .....	1
	Where We Are Located .....	2
2.	What to Expect .....	4
	Getting Started .....	4
	Joining the Class .....	5
	Making Progress .....	5
	Reaching Your Goals .....	5
3.	Student Rights and Responsibilities.....	6
4.	Policies .....	7
	Attendance Policy .....	7
	Non-Discrimination Policy .....	8
	Grievance Policy .....	9
	Confidentiality .....	10
	ADA Policy .....	11
	Smoke-Free Policy .....	11
	Safety in the Classroom .....	12

# 1. Introduction

## **Who We Are**

The Literacy Project is an adult basic education program. We offer free classes to adults (16 years old or older). If you cannot attend classes, we offer a Distance Learning program.

## **What We Teach**

1. Reading, Writing and Math
2. G.E.D. Preparation
3. Science
4. Creative Writing
5. History and Current Events
6. Computers and the Internet
7. Health and Parenting
8. Communication and Leadership

## **Who Can Attend**

In order to attend our classes, you must

- be 16 or older,
- be out of school, and
- have some ability to speak and understand English

You also must agree to:

- follow the Attendance Policy, and
- accept the Student Rights and Responsibilities

## **Where We Are Located**

We have five learning centers, in Franklin and Hampshire Counties. You can attend a learning center or study from anywhere, anytime with our Distance Learning program.

### **Amherst**

The Literacy Project, Amherst  
401 Main Street, Ground Floor  
Amherst, MA 01002  
413-259-1663

### **Greenfield**

The Literacy Project, Greenfield  
15 Bank Row, Suite D, Second Floor  
Greenfield, MA 01301  
413-774-3935

### **Orange**

The Literacy Project, North Quabbin  
34 North Main Street  
Orange, MA 01364  
978-544-8917

## **Northampton**

The Literacy Project, Northampton  
1 Brewster Court #1  
Northampton, MA 01060  
413-584-6755

## **Ware**

The Literacy Project, Ware  
23 West Main Street, Suite 3  
Ware, MA 01082  
413-967-9902

# 2. What to Expect

## Getting Started

If you are just starting out with us, here is what you can expect:

1. We'll talk to you about your goals and past experience with school.
2. We'll assess your strengths and what you will need to work on.
3. We'll assign you to a class.
4. You'll work in small groups (no more than 10 people) and one-on-one, with our staff teachers, volunteers, and peer tutors.
5. You'll work at your own pace.
6. We'll review your progress with you regularly.
7. There will be many opportunities to get involved in projects and activities beyond your own studies.

Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for you to learn.

## **Joining the Class**

We work hard to make a comfortable classroom. We sit in circles or around tables. We encourage everyone to work together and help each other. We set the rules and make decisions as a group. We believe that everyone has things to teach as well as things to learn – including the teachers.

## **Making Progress**

We do not give grades, so you will not get a report card from us. There are many ways to see your progress. For example, you may:

- 1) understand more of what you read
- 2) read and write more often
- 3) feel more confident about doing math
- 4) speak up for yourself more, and
- 5) improve your scores on GED practice tests

If you have questions about your progress, talk to your teacher.

## **Reaching Your Goals**

You may want to know how long it will take to reach your goals. The answer depends on you and your goals. Everyone works at a different pace, and we all learn differently. The best way to reach your goals quickly is to come to class regularly and work hard!

# 3. Student Rights and Responsibilities

## Rights

I have the right to:

1. Learn at my own pace.
2. Not feel put down.
3. Be treated with respect.
4. Feel safe.
5. Set my own goals.
6. Ask questions.
7. Evaluate my instructors.

**If you feel that any of your rights have been denied, please speak to a staff member.**

## Responsibilities

1. I agree to follow the attendance policy.
2. I will show respect for myself, and for other people and their property.
3. I will use the classroom resources for learning.
4. I will try my best to learn and help others learn.
5. I will come to school free of alcohol and drugs.
6. I will not use violence or threats or carry weapons in the classroom.

# 4. Policies

## Attendance Policy

You must attend regularly in order to make progress toward achieving your goals.

### **Minimum Requirement:**

Students must attend at least 3 out of 4 classes (75% of their scheduled class time). If your attendance falls below 75% in a month, we will meet with you to talk about next steps. These could include:

- helping you find ways to come to class more
- asking you to leave class if your attendance does not improve

### **Being Absent:**

- Let us know in advance if you are going to be absent.

If you do not call us to explain your absence, and you miss:

- 1 week of classes: we will call you to find out if you want to continue to attend classes.

- 2 weeks of classes: we will send you a letter telling you that you must contact us before you can return to class.
- If you miss one month of classes, and we haven't heard from you, you will be removed from our class list. You will be welcome to return when you feel you are able to meet this attendance requirement. Please call to make an appointment.
- **We understand that people may have illness, and personal or family issues to deal with at times, and we will try to be flexible. However, you will not make progress in your studies if you do not attend regularly.**

### **Non-Discrimination Policy**

We will not discriminate against a student based on:

1. race,
2. color,
3. religion,
4. national origin,
5. sex or gender identity,
6. sexual orientation,
7. marital status,
8. age,

9. disability,
10. status as a veteran, or
11. union membership

If you feel that you have been discriminated against, contact the Executive Director, 413-774-3934, extension 17.

## **Grievance Policy**

A grievance is a problem or conflict you have with The Literacy Project. As a student, you have a right to have your concerns listened to. We will try to resolve the problem by talking it out. If you can't resolve the problem directly with the staff person involved, you can meet with another staff person in the organization.

Here's how a grievance process works:

1. Start by speaking directly to the person you have a conflict with. (If you'd like help with how to talk about the conflict or problem, you may ask any staff person at The Literacy Project.)
2. If that doesn't resolve the problem, then you can meet with another staff person at the site.

3. If that doesn't work, then meet with the Executive Director, 413-774-3934, extension 17.
4. Finally, if the problem is still not solved, you can meet with the Board of Directors.

The decision of the Board of Directors is final. At each stage, you can have a friend or staff member present, if you wish.

### **Confidentiality**

Your participation in our program is confidential. Sometimes other programs or people outside The Literacy Project will ask for information about your participation. We will only share your information if you have given us your written permission. There are several exceptions to this rule:

1. We will record your attendance and progress information in a computer database, as part of our reporting to our funder, the Department of Education.
2. If you are 16 or 17 years old and your parents or guardians request attendance records or progress information, we will provide them

with the information. We will try our best to inform you before we give out this information.

3. We may share information about your progress with other members of The Literacy Project staff, so that we can best help you to meet your goals.
4. We are mandated reporters for the Department of Social Services (DSS). This means that if there is reason to believe that a child (under 18 years old) is at risk of being harmed, we are required to report it to DSS.
5. If we have reason to believe that you may be at risk of seriously harming yourself or others, we will contact appropriate services outside of our program.

### **ADA Policy**

We comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. We will provide reasonable accommodations and equal opportunities to people with disabilities.

### **Smoke-Free Policy**

The Literacy Project wants to protect everyone from second-hand smoke. Smoking is not allowed in any building of The Literacy Project.

### **Safety in the Classroom**

The Literacy Project's goal is to build a safe community of learners. We prohibit violence of any kind in our classes and offices.

#### 1. The Bottom Line

**You will be asked to leave the classroom if you threaten or harm another person, carry a weapon, or come to class under the influence of alcohol or drugs. If you are asked to leave for one of these reasons, you must meet with the teacher before returning to class.**

#### 2. Groundrules

To help make a safe classroom, each class sets their own groundrules, and posts them at the site. The rules will be different for each class, but these are always included:

- No drugs or alcohol in the classroom.
- Be respectful of one another.
- No language or behavior that puts down other groups.

- No one may physically, verbally or emotionally abuse another person.

### 3. Restraining Orders

Let us know about any Restraining Orders involving you or anyone else who might come to class.

### 4. Getting Help

We understand that many people experience difficult situations in their lives that may prevent them from achieving their goals. These may include violence, homelessness, mental health issues, drug and alcohol abuse, and other health-related issues. If you want help, we can work with you to find resources. Ask any staff member for help.