



The Liberty School

WHERE DYSLEXIC & GIFTED STUDENTS SOAR

2024-2025

**PARENT/STUDENT
HANDBOOK**

Purpose Statement: (Joyce Bilgrave, Founder):

The Liberty School is a place of exciting discovery; a place where children are taught in ways that ensure success; a place where each child feels safe, valued, and confident; a place for students to reach their fullest potential academically, emotionally, and creatively.

Mission:

The Liberty School provides individualized, dynamic education for dyslexic, academically gifted, and twice-exceptional (dyslexic *and* gifted) students.

Values: (student-created):

We are kind and compassionate to ourselves and others. We take quiet pride in our strengths. We act respectfully. We learn from our mistakes. We make things right when we hurt someone. We encourage each other. We are family and don't leave others out.

NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

This policy states the Liberty School's position on discrimination. This policy applies to the Liberty School's employees, teachers, volunteers, board members, students, parents, contractors, and clients served.

The Liberty School does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, creed, color, ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability, veteran status, or marital status.

ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (concise summary)

Head of School (Christian Holmen)

- Personnel decisions and management
- Classroom teaching and oversight
- Student discipline
- Accreditation
- Support of facility
- Coordination with Board of Directors
- Admissions lead
- Budget

Director of Operations (Chery Gretz)

- Scholarship management
- Alumni Engagement
- Marketing
- Desktop Publishing support for all marketing materials
- School Website
- Event planning support
- Technology support

- Community outreach

Operations Coordinator (Christina Hoy)

- Manage front office (phone calls, visitors, etc)
- Tuition Payments
- Informal school nurse
- School social media presence
- Payroll/Payments
- Communication with parents
- Newsletter
- Volunteer management
- Records management
- Fundraising support

Tutoring Supervisor (MJ Bilgrav)

- Coordination of tutors
- Evaluation and support of tutors
- Admissions and Psych-Ed report assistance
- Testing and 504 support

Accounting (Bonnie Rozean)

- Bookkeeping and audits
- Grant support
- Support for tuition payments
- Budgeting

REGISTRATION

Necessary documents and items to be submitted before the first day of school:

- Liability release
- Medical forms signed by a physician or registered nurse
- Immunization records
- Written authorization for emergency medical care
- Behavior/Work Expectations contract
- General field trip permission form
- Signed tuition agreement
- Technology contract

SCHOOL HOURS & DROPOFF/PICKUP

Drop-off for all students is between 7:45am and 8:15am in the roundabout. Please do not park in the roundabout, so if you'd like to come inside, please park in the overflow parking area. **It is very important that cars drive below 15 mph** when accessing the school on Hocker, Sunnyside, and Pleasant, and that families drive on their assigned streets. This will help minimize the traffic impacts on our neighbors. **If someone OTHER than a student's parents will be picking up, notify the front desk.**

(Monday-Half Day)	
School Start	8:15am
School End	12:40pm

(Tuesday-Friday)	
School Start	8:15am
School End	3:15pm

ATTENDANCE

To maximize learning, students are expected to be in classes with the following exceptions:

- Illness (note: "Mental health days" should be cleared with the Head of School in advance. Tremendous effort goes into preparing daily lessons for every student, and consistent attendance is vital to maximize learning)
- Family emergencies
- Medical appointments that cannot be scheduled after/before school hours
- Observance of religious holidays

If a student must miss school or be late, notify the front office as soon as possible. If a student must leave school early, please provide a verbal or emailed authorization to the office.

It is important that punctuality be modeled; please make every effort to get students to school on time. Attendance records will be noted on student reports.

If school days are missed, teachers will communicate work expectations while they are absent. For Junior High students, students will be allowed one day for each day missed in order to make up missed work. We will also encourage students to practice self advocating if they will need additional time.

DRESS CODE

We want students to feel comfortable and relaxed at school, and we believe in an informal environment and a casual dress code. However, to prevent students from distraction, certain clothing is *not* allowed, including:

- Shirts with references to drugs, alcohol, weapons, or offensive messages
- Inappropriately holey pants (holes above mid-thigh)
- Visible undergarments
- Pajamas or other "nightwear" (unless for a scheduled pajama day)
- Excessively short shorts or skirts

Additionally, because we want our students to develop self-confidence, we do not allow students to wear hoods or hats in a manner that hides the face. Lastly, **appropriate footwear is required**. One pair of closed-toed shoes will be necessary for outside activities, and comfortable shoes or slippers with a grippy sole should be worn inside. Our outside property has sharp rocks, thorns, and other hazards. Two pairs of shoes are recommended to help maintain a clean facility. During the winter, snow boots will be necessary.

FOOD POLICY

Nutrition and learning are closely linked, so please provide healthy snacks and lunches for your student. Microwaves are available for student use, as well as a hot water machine. Please provide the following:

- Healthy snacks
- Nutritious lunch
- **Labeled** water bottle

PLEASE DO **NOT** SEND:

- Caffeinated drinks
- Candy

If your student has dietary restrictions, please notify the school of these in writing. The sharing of food and/or drink is discouraged to minimize the spread of illness.

BIRTHDAY PARTIES & SOCIAL GATHERINGS

Liberty is a tight, inclusive community, so we ask that you be sensitive to the feelings of every child when making birthday or social plans. If you're hosting a party or gathering and aren't inviting all the students, please do not send communications about the party to school. We also ask that transportation arrangements take place off-campus if the entire student body is not included.

Student birthdays are celebrated at school during lunch periods. Parents that wish to send a treat to share are encouraged to do so. If possible, please check with the Office Manager about food allergies, and please provide a gluten-free option.

PRESCRIPTIONS

If your child's physician prescribes medication that must be taken during the school day, specific instructions and forms must be signed by the physician and accompany the medication in the original bottle. Parents or guardians must deliver medication directly to the office manager. Students may not transport medication to school. The school will make arrangements for administering medication according to the doctor's directions.

In case of a missed dosage, extra medication should be provided to the office

in an original, labeled bottle with instructions.

All non-prescription medications will be handled in a similar way. Parents may request that the school administer over-the-counter medications to their child. Before administering the medication, the school must have on file the appropriate medical form.

Students may **NOT** carry their own medication.

NOTE: No medication may be administered without proper documentation.

ILLNESS

Please **do not** bring your child to school if she/he:

- Has vomited in the last 24 hours due to illness
- Has had a fever in the last 24 hours
- Has strep throat (until they have been treated for 24 hours)
- Has a runny nose with thick, colored mucus
- Has an illness that prevents comfortable participation in school activities

When the school becomes aware that a student has a communicable disease (chicken pox, measles, etc.), all parents will be notified immediately. All efforts will be taken to maintain privacy.

IMMUNIZATION EXEMPTION

Children may attend The Liberty School without immunizations. This could be for medical, religious or personal reasons. Families who are exempt from immunization are required to furnish the "Statement of Exemption to Immunization Law" form to the school. However, in accordance with the Colorado Board of Health Rules, "In the event of an outbreak, no exemptions or exceptions from immunization shall be recognized, and exempt persons will be subject to exclusion from school and quarantine."

ACCIDENTS & SUDDEN ILLNESS

All Liberty teachers and administration maintain current C.P.R. and First Aid certification.

A child who becomes ill or injured while at school will be isolated in a comfortable place until a parent or authorized person arrives to pick the child up.

Staff will administer first aid for minor accidents including scrapes, bumps, bruises, and minor cuts. Parents will be notified immediately in case of serious accident or injury. When necessary, students will be transported to an Emergency Room, or 911 will be called, depending on the situation.

TUITION & FEES

A separate tuition, fees, and payment plan agreement must be completed by parents. There are four ways tuition may be paid: in-full, quarterly, 10-month, or 12-month. Please review the contract carefully. Note: parents/guardians are responsible for payment in full, and refunds are not awarded.

Technology/Supply fees go towards providing and maintaining Chromebooks, as well as assessment and educational software subscriptions. Supply fees go towards student supplies such as notecards, markers, paper, disinfectant, etc.

MEDICAL TAX DEDUCTION

For information on claiming tuition as a medical deduction, please refer to the IRS Code CCH Section 2019, 0127 as well as IRS Ruling 69-607 at 2CB40. These citations, accompanied by a statement from the pediatrician, psychiatrist, psychologist or neurologist who referred your child to The Liberty School, will provide your accountant or attorney with information necessary to advise you about deducting the tuition as a medical expense.

If your child is medically diagnosed with a specific learning disability known as "developmental dyslexia" (or equivalent), all costs for diagnostic testing for any kind of specialized program or tutorial assistance for your child's education should be considered as income tax deductible under IRS ruling HB #369-607, IRB 1969-43,13. Also, see publication 502, Medical and Dental Expenses, department of Treasury, IRS Page 3, Columns 2 and 3.

FINANCIAL AID

The Liberty School conducts robust fundraising efforts in order to provide partial scholarships to families based on financial need. Contact the school for details and a scholarship application form. We also partner with ACE Scholarships to further augment our scholarship funding.

PARENT VOLUNTEERING

10 hours of volunteering is asked of each Liberty family. There are many opportunities for volunteering. Not only will volunteering help you feel connected and invested with the school, your volunteer hours can be a powerful inclusion for some of the many grants the school applies for. Parents can sign up to help the school in a variety of ways, including building and property maintenance, field trip supervision, office assistance, etc.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Liberty uses wireless Internet, school-provided Chromebooks, and classroom iMacs for a wide variety of purposes, and student use of the Internet will be during supervised classroom activities. Inappropriate websites will not be tolerated. A Technology Agreement will be provided for students to review and agree to with their family. Essentially, this agreement states that technology use is a privilege to be handled with responsibility, and that misuse of equipment will result in appropriate consequences. We will provide each student with any necessary technology. **Please do not bring personal technology (tablets,**

laptops, etc) to school.

CELL PHONES/SMART WATCHES

While cell phones have become a ubiquitous part of our modern society, we believe cell phones can inhibit our students' social development and school engagement. Our goal is to maintain a strong school culture that feels like family. **Therefore, all cell phones must be checked into the front office for the duration of the school day. They may not be kept in backpacks or on a student's person. Parents who allow their child to bring a cellphone to school must share the cell number with our Operations Coordinator.** Bluetooth will be turned off so that smartwatches can't be used as a cell phone. Teachers may periodically give specific permission during classroom activities that can take advantage of particular cell phone applications such as calculators, calendars, or cameras. Cell phones may be picked up when students are dismissed from school. **Parents/guardians who need to contact their child during school hours should call the office; our Operations Coordinator will happily deliver messages promptly.** In the case of an emergency, cell phones will be made immediately available.

PROHIBITION OF POSTING IMAGES AND VIDEOS FROM SCHOOL-RELATED EVENTS

This policy is designed to protect the privacy of students, staff, and community members by regulating the sharing of images and videos captured during school-related events.

Students, staff, parents, and visitors are strictly prohibited from posting, sharing, or distributing any images or videos taken during school-related events on social media, websites, or any other public platforms without the explicit permission of the school administration.

This policy applies to all school-related events, including but not limited to:

- Class activities
- Extracurricular events
- Field trips
- School assemblies
- Performances and ceremonies

Failure to comply with this policy will result in the loss of phone privileges at school and school functions

Exceptions to this policy may be granted under special circumstances, but only with prior written consent from the school administration.

SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

Effective communication with parents is one of our highest priorities. To ensure that families are kept up-to-date about all relevant school information, we issue a weekly newsletter via email, and a current school calendar can be found on our website. Teachers/Administration may also use the *Remind* app to share important reminders or information. Reminders about important events will also be shared via email. Of course, Liberty staff are happy to chat in person; simply schedule a time when the teacher/tutor/admin is available.

For any major concerns or misunderstandings, parents should contact the Head of School immediately.

NOTE: Calendar dates ARE subject to change. While every effort is made to adhere to originally planned dates, changes must sometimes be made for a wide variety of reasons.

STUDENT WORK EXPECTATIONS

Liberty staff takes great effort to understand the strengths, weaknesses, and abilities of every child. With this in mind, we design individualized work assignments and provide the necessary support for students to complete meaningful work. If a Liberty student, despite teacher encouragement and assistance, makes the decision to refuse to work while at school, parents/guardians may be called to pick him/her up. They will then be responsible for missed work at home. Consistent work avoidance/resistance may be grounds for dismissal.

HOMEWORK

Homework at Liberty may be significantly less than parents are likely accustomed to. This is because students at Liberty work extremely hard at the things that pose the greatest challenge throughout the day. By the time they get home, their brains *will* be fatigued, and they will need time to process what they've learned. However, we do believe that doing a moderate amount of meaningful homework is an important skill to develop.

The type and amount of homework assigned will be determined on an individual and class-by-class basis. Once reasonable student expectations have been determined by classroom teachers, *clear* homework plans will be shared with parents. Homework plans will be communicated within the first two weeks of school. Any changes that occur throughout the year will be clearly communicated. In an effort to prepare for high school, middle school homework expectations will be more rigorous than for elementary students.

Typically, teachers will assign homework on a weekly basis in order to allow students to practice time management and planning, and also to provide flexibility for students who are active in after-school activities.

While most homework will be only for math, Junior High Students may also be assigned reading and possible comprehension questions. Failure to complete homework assignments consistently will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

If school days are missed for any reason, teachers will communicate work expectations while they are absent. For Junior High students, students will be allowed one day for each day missed in order to make up missed work. This includes in-class instruction material (text and/or videos) and assignments. We will also encourage students to practice self advocating if they will need additional time.

STUDENT TESTING

Assessment of student learning at Liberty is an ongoing process. Formal, summative assessment using nationally normed tests occurs twice per year to measure student language growth in the areas of decoding, word recognition, reading fluency and comprehension, and spelling. Math testing measures student progress in concepts/communication, operations/computation, and process/applications. Beginning-year testing is also used to ensure that students are placed in the appropriate classes (regardless of age/grade), and so tutors can pinpoint precisely where to begin instruction.

Formative assessments occur on a regular basis and provide teachers, tutors, and students with immediate, real-time feedback about the effectiveness of instruction. Examples of formative assessments could be students writing the main idea from a concept presented during class on a sticky note, or verbally articulating their reasoning while solving a math problem.

Both forms of assessment will provide information that Liberty teachers and tutors use to maximize student learning and for students to recognize and celebrate their growth.

LANGUAGE TUTORS

Liberty language tutors are our most important and valuable resource. Using the Orton-Gillingham approach and working one-on-one is the gold standard for remediating students with dyslexia. Our language tutors are carefully selected, trained, supported, and evaluated by our Tutoring Supervisor, MJ Bilgrav. It is important to understand that a great deal of thought, time, and energy go into pairing language tutors with individual students. After these pairings are made, we must also ensure that students can be placed into ability-appropriate core classes such as math and writing. Due to the highly complex nature of our program and student schedules, tutor requests can be made, but never guaranteed. Additionally, it is never guaranteed that a student will have the same tutor from year to year.

CURRICULUM SELECTION

As an independent school, Liberty has the freedom to design and use the curriculum that will best serve our student population. Great care is taken to research and select curriculum material that is effective, age-appropriate, accessible, and engaging. The Colorado Department of Education standards play an important role in curriculum selection and development, though we must also balance individual student needs as well in order to maximize student learning.

CURRICULUM NIGHT

Every fall, Liberty holds a parent Curriculum Night where families can attend each of their child's core classes to hear specifics about what skills and concepts are covered, how instruction is delivered, what materials are used, what homework to expect, and general classroom expectations. We also explain how student testing is used and interpreted. Time is also provided for general Q&A.

REPORTS AND PARENT CONFERENCES

Two times per year, families will be provided with narrative reports summarizing student progress and the subject matter covered in classes. These reports will also include all relevant testing data. Families will be asked to attend parent-teacher conferences twice per year. These conferences will include the student's language tutor and their math teacher during Winter and Spring conferences. Academic and social-emotional progress will be discussed, and any concerns will be addressed. We ask that both parents attend conferences whenever possible. Important insights and helpful feedback from conferences will be documented and shared with each student's teachers.

CURRENT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE POLICY (subject to change)

With the rapid advancement and proliferation of generative Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), the time has come for The Liberty School to develop a policy to appropriately manage its use. Generative A.I. and programs like *ChatGPT* are here to stay and they are only going to improve over time. Because it will be impossible to pretend that this technology doesn't exist, and because this technology could truly be a useful tool for students like ours with learning differences, we want our A.I. policy to be practical, balanced, and reflect our shared values. Our goal at Liberty will remain to develop competent, independent writers, but expose them to A.I. technology so that they will be able to successfully navigate whatever policies may be in place when they matriculate to high school. In a nutshell, we are viewing generative A.I. as an accommodation, similar to *Grammarly* or *Speechify*, that should be taught in order to be used effectively and responsibly. As this technology is cutting-edge and rapidly changing, this policy is simply a starting point for continued refinement over time.

After staff collaboration, research, and discussion, our current A.I. policy is outlined below:

1. Only students in grades seven and eight will be permitted to use A.I.
2. Teachers will make clear what assignments can be enhanced by A.I.

3. Students will be required to complete their own writing and **THEN** run it through an A.I. program for potential enhancements
4. Any writing samples should include original student work AND the A.I. enhanced version (printed copies of both versions should be made so a clear version history is documented)
5. Students must declare any time that they've used A.I.
6. Generative A.I. will be permitted as an editing tool, **NOT** as a way to avoid having to do work
7. With direct teacher guidance, A.I. may also be used to generate outlines or ideas
8. If a student is suspected of using A.I. improperly, student work will be run through at least one detection program
9. As a general guideline, we will aim for A.I. enhanced papers to be no more than 30% generated by A.I.
10. If a student is found to have been using A.I. improperly, they will be placed on academic probation and a modified assignment must be completed instead with only parent support within seven days and without school time to work on it
11. A second violation will result in student suspension and a grade of zero for the assignment

BENCHMARKS FOR TRANSITIONAL READINESS

To help determine when a student may be ready to transition back into a more traditional school setting, we have created a list of academic benchmarks that will help guide discussions. Students are welcome, of course, to remain at Liberty for as long as they wish, but it is our goal to prepare students to successfully transition as soon as possible. Below are some of the specific benchmarks that may indicate that a student is ready to transition:

Measurable Benchmarks

- At-or-above grade level in ALEKS and/or GMADE
- (For going into middle school) Ability to create three, 5-sentence, colored paragraphs in short essay form independently or with minimal supports
- (For going into high school) Ability to create a structured, 5-paragraph essay independently or with minimal supports
- Close to grade level in GORT Fluency and Comprehension (above grade level is ideal)
- DSPT Spelling close to 6th grade so that spell-checking A.I. can be effective
- Max IOTA score at 5.5
- Woodcock Word Attack score close to 16.9
- Ballpark typing fluency goals:
 - 4th grade: 15-20 WPM at 90% accuracy or above
 - 5th grade: 20-25 WPM at 90% accuracy or above
 - 6th grade: 25-30 WPM at 90% accuracy or above

- 7th grade 30-35 WPM at 90% accuracy or above
- 8th grade 35-40 WPM at 90% accuracy or above

Other Important Benchmarks

- Emotional maturity
- Investment in own learning
- Executive Function
 - Emerging skills with assistive technology (specific to their needs)
 - Completes quality work on time
 - Ability to self-regulate
 - Ability to manage and complete longer-term assignments in small chunks
- Awareness of strengths/weaknesses
- Emerging ability to self-advocate

FIELD TRIPS

The Liberty School believes field trips are a valuable, meaningful part of education. Parents/guardians must return a signed permission form **prior** to the start of school in order for their child to participate. Parents will be notified in advance before their child is taken off campus. Occasionally, parents/guardians will be asked to pay for additional costs incurred.

Proper behavior is required of all students, staff, and volunteers during field trips. While off campus, we strive to represent Liberty in a positive light. Most importantly, the safety of our students is our highest priority; therefore, students who cannot follow direction, or otherwise put themselves or others in difficult or unsafe situations, will not be permitted on future trips.

ELEMENTARY/JUNIOR HIGH

For the purposes of scheduling and programming, students who begin the school year as 7th or 8th graders will be considered Junior High students. All others are considered elementary students.

Junior High student instruction will begin to focus less on dyslexia remediation and place an increasing emphasis on preparing our students for a successful transition to high school. As such, Junior High students will receive letter grades for many of their academic classes, and they will begin to have rubrics on more assignments and projects. They will begin to receive more feedback on their work, including non-graded self and peer feedback. Increased emphasis will also be placed on practicing self-advocacy, learning to manage projects and presentations, and mastering assistive technology.

DOGS

Liberty is a dog-friendly school, and staff who wish to bring their canine friends are welcome under the following conditions:

- All dogs remain non-aggressive at all times with humans and other dogs
- All dogs must be on a leash or under strict voice control when in the building
- All dogs must be supervised and under the control of an adult when outside
- All dogs are cleaned up after (inside and out)
- All dogs must not distract or disrupt during classes or tutoring

If a dog cannot abide by these expectations, they will not be allowed on campus

BEHAVIOR AND WORK EXPECTATIONS

The supportive, loving, positive school culture at Liberty is one of our most prized assets, and it is likely one of the main reasons you want your child to attend school here. Another vital reason you likely want your child at Liberty is to make significant academic gains. Therefore, we want to be explicitly clear about what is expected of our students and the process for when expectations are not met.

Hopefully it goes without saying that we aim to employ every possible resource in order for every student to feel supported, succeed, and thrive during his/her time here. Also, as in any family, we understand that there may be conflict from time to time. There may be days when working hard is especially difficult for any number of reasons. We strive to impart tools that will help students learn to successfully navigate through these challenges. To successfully deliver our mission, however, there are some basic, yet very important expectations that we require of every student.

We expect each student will:

- Show respect for staff and students
- Put forth reasonable effort
- Accept teacher help
- Comply with all reasonable teacher directions

We cannot tolerate:

- Bullying in any form
- Chronically disruptive behavior
- Refusal to work

When a student is behaving poorly in class, we first try to understand the underlying cause so we can effectively find solutions. Teachers build strong, caring relationships with students here, so behavioral intervention is often as simple as a private conversation or two. Teachers also employ role-play to help students understand the impact of their behavior, and elements of the *Love and Logic* approach, so students understand the natural consequences of their actions.

Classroom teachers will do their best to manage issues as they arise, but if they continue despite interventions, the Head of School will become involved and parents will be notified in an effort to solicit help from home. If teacher and parent interventions prove to be ineffective, the student will not be allowed to continue attending Liberty.

BULLYING

Because a positive, supportive school environment is essential to our mission, physical or verbal aggression at Liberty will not be tolerated. Because bullying can sometimes be a nebulous concept, however, we create opportunities to educate our students about what bullying *is*, and what it is *not*. We also conduct role-play scenarios to practice appropriate responses and interventions when students witness bullying behavior.

BATHROOMS

Student bathrooms are unisex and use is limited to one-at-a-time.

DIGITAL SHARING FROM SCHOOL

Students will not be permitted to share photos, video, or audio from anything recorded during school hours or during school events without explicit permission from Liberty Administration.

SCHOOL SECURITY & EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The safety of your child at school is our very first priority. Therefore, The Liberty School will be locked at all times and accessible only by staff who have a personalized password or school-issued key. Front office personnel will admit parents to the school. The school will conduct a variety of emergency response drills and coordinate with all local emergency response teams to help maintain efficient, safe protocols.

ALCOHOL, ILLEGAL DRUGS, OR WEAPONS

Alcohol, illegal drugs, or weapons will not be tolerated on The Liberty School campus, and possession of them will result in expulsion.

LANGUAGE TUTOR ASSIGNMENTS

Creating our individualized student schedules each year is one of the most challenging things we do. In order to ensure that each student is placed in the most appropriate math and writing classes possible, and due to a number of other important factors, we cannot guarantee that returning students will remain with their prior-year's tutor. We promise, however, to make the best pairings possible for every student, every year.