

## **PTSO Meeting Guest Speaker – Mr. Jace Palmer, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Counselor on the Transition to HS**

*\*\*These notes were taken during the discussion by a parent, and therefore represent her interpretation of the conversations that took place. They are not intended to represent precise instructions from Mr. Palmer, Fort Couch, USCHS or the School District. They are offered for parents who might not have attended the PTSO meeting and would be interested in the nature of the discussion. Any parent with specific questions should contact their child's teacher and/or counselor for further information.*

Mr. Jace Palmer was an assistant principal at USC High School for 10 years and a counselor for 7 years.

Mr. Palmer will be going over all of these things and the tips he gives to help with the Transition from 8<sup>th</sup> Grade to High School, with all of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students at the end of this school year.

### **Activities**

All students should get involved in *something* quickly - within the first couple of months. This is a great way to meet people, and people from all grades, quickly. Fall sports or marching band will already provide that opportunity for some students. Also, within the first three weeks of school, all 9<sup>th</sup> graders are invited to attend "Freshman Rush" where all clubs and activities set up tables in the gym to promote their club or activities and recruit/invite freshman to join. Mr. Palmer suggests signing up for at least one club. Clubs are not like at Fort Couch – in the HS clubs are all after school and most include students in all grades. Don't sign up for 10 clubs to "build your resume" – colleges will know that a student couldn't possibly be active in all those clubs. Pick a few and get involved, colleges look for where you make a difference and leadership.

It is about *Quality* – *not Quantity* – over a 4-year time period.

### **Scheduling**

Over the summer – highly recommend taking time to go to the High School and walk around – especially after students receive their schedules in the mail, to walk through the schedule and find the rooms.

Homeroom is simply assigned in *alphabetical order*. It runs from 7:30-7:40 a.m. every day and is only for the purpose of taking attendance and listening to the morning announcements. Student's homeroom will be the same teacher and students for all four years of HS, as will his/her locker. After homeroom ends those students go in all different directions based on the schedule of courses they have.

Throughout mid-February Mr. Palmer is scheduling classes with the 8<sup>th</sup> graders in his class times.

Mr. Palmer will tell the students "Try not to compare yourself to everyone else. Your competition is not the kid sitting next to you, it is kids in your graduating class all across the country."

It is ok for everyone to do different things, make different choices related to class scheduling. The evaluations and recommendations of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers are typically accurate, and are a great starting point.

There is a difference between being recommended for 3 honors classes and deciding to only take 2, and being recommended for 1 and deciding to "try" 2 or 3 honors classes. Students need to understand that if you decide to "try" an honors class just to see how it goes, there is a chance that when you want to move into the academic class, there may not be space left in the class to register for it – science classes with labs in particular have smaller class sizes and strict limits.

When making decisions for which classes to take need to consider the thoughts of teachers, counselors, parents and students and weigh all of the information.

Don't schedule to match friends because you can't be sure to be in the same exact classes, even if you schedule the same courses. Tailor your schedule to be match the student.

### **Standardized Tests**

9<sup>th</sup> graders should not be worried about standardized tests.

9<sup>th</sup> grade students will take the Biology Keystone exam – No Matter Which Biology they take in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they will be very prepared to take that exam.

10<sup>th</sup> grade Mr. Palmer recommends that they take the PSAT for practice. The PSATs are only offered once a year – in October.

11<sup>th</sup> grade they will officially take the PSATs in October and then they will take additional standardized tests (SAT/ACT) in the spring.

### **QUESTIONS by PARENTS:**

#### **Q: Where can I see a list of class descriptions?**

**A:** Visit the High School website – then select the Counseling menu at the top of the page – then select the Program of Studies menu on the left side menu. Click on the link for the 2019-2020 Program of Studies pdf document. It is a very large document, with many helpful lists and details.

<https://www.uscsd.k12.pa.us/cms/lib/PA01000033/Centricity/Domain/200/2019-2020%20Program%20of%20Studies4.pdf>

#### **Q: Can you talk a little about the 9<sup>th</sup> grade IB Program?**

**A:** Benefit of staying in the IB program through 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade in order to attain the MYP (IB Middle Years Program) certificate at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, is that it is one more thing that you did extra that colleges will notice. It includes a 30 hours of community service requirement per year that is more strictly enforced than in the lower grades. There is also an MYP Personal Project in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The project can be almost anything and tends to be rooted in something the student is passionate about, and then is turned into a project.

However, no college is specifically looking for students with the MYP because there are so few schools who offer it, so it does not count “against” a student if he/she decides not to do the MYP program.

The MYP program is DIFFERENT from the IB Diploma program.

In 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grade students can decide to pursue the IB Diploma which is a Very Rigorous course-load. This program is not so much about projects as it is about the rigor of the classes and the special exams at the end of the years. Typically, only about 8-15 students a year graduate with the IB Diploma. Colleges definitely recognize how difficult the IB Diploma is and it does provide an advantage when applying. There are schedule requirements that are necessary in order to stay on track to complete the IB Diploma and the decision is made at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In order to be adequately prepared, a student should take honors English and math in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### **Q: Can you discuss Honors/AP grading and weighted grades?**

**A:** Details pertaining to the weight of grades for the various courses are available in the Program of Studies (page 8). Typically an A=4 points, B=3 points... Honors and AP classes have weighted grades, and the weight gets a little “heavier” each semester of HS. So, it is not possible to attain a 5.0 gpa until the final gpa is calculated at the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

There is no longer Class Rank on the transcript for USC students. However, there are still valedictorians for the graduating class and weighted gpa is a part of that decision.

**Q: What is the Certificate of Global Fluency program?**

**A:** Detailed description is in the Program of Studies document (page 14). The program has been offered for a number of years now and will be listed on the transcript. The program requires a schedule of coursework to meet a list of requirements subject matter areas related to international/social studies and international travel and activities.

**Q: If you are in a fall sport, can you still do a club or is it too much?**

**A:** Yes! Students who are in a fall sport should still sign up for a club. Clubs at the HS understand that at different times of year different students will be able to be more or less involved based on the other activities that he/she has going on. Clubs do not look down on that because lots of students are doing lots of things and some times of year the club may be more the focus, and other times of year a sport or other activity may be more of the focus.

All 8<sup>th</sup> grade students will be shown a list of the current HS clubs at the end of this school year, although it is a fluid list because it is driven by student interest and involvement. New clubs can be made and old clubs can end.

**Q: How does a student start a club?**

**A:** Student would visit the student activities office and complete a form that demonstrates some student interest (maybe 5? or more students want to participate) and also a staff member to support the club.

**Q: Is it true some students don't have lunch?**

**A:** There is a small percentage of students who do not schedule a lunch period specifically in their schedule. Typically, these are students who have opted to schedule multiple electives as well as including Band/Chorus/Orchestra. Those teachers have procedures in place to allow students to eat lunch during their class times. Most students take World Language + an elective in their schedule (either a full year elective or a half year elective for each semester). These lunch scheduling decisions are made on a case by case basis with students and parents.

**Q: How does the schedule day run at the HS?**

**A:** There are 16 "mods" that are each 25 minutes long, in addition to 10 minutes of Homeroom at the beginning of the day. A bell rings at each mod, and students whose schedules allow it at that mod may move around throughout the building. Most of the student day is spent in 50 minute classes that cover 2 mods. Lunch is also 50 minutes (as opposed to 30 minutes at FC) and covers 2 mods, so students often use some of the time in one location and then move to another location (cafeteria, library, resource room, Cafe321, etc). There are some "free" or "flexible" mods in a typical student schedule as well. Lunches are scheduled during mods 7/8, 9/10, or 11/12 and include students from all grade levels.

**Q: What are other IB MYP requirements that impact schedule?**

**A:** If staying in IB, then students need to stay in their current world language. There are also Arts and Technology requirements for IB that can be met through electives, or STEAM camp in the summer.

**Q: How does the wellness class and scheduling work?**

**A:** Details are provided in the Program of Studies (page 105). Wellness is typically Health for one semester and PE for the other semester. The Health semester includes 2 classroom days a week, 2 "flex" days a week (day when Health related curriculum is required but not in the formal classroom

setting), and 1 “free” period a week. The PE semester includes 4 PE classes a week and 1 “free” period a week. Summer Gym is a possibility for students only AFTER the 9<sup>th</sup> grade or 10<sup>th</sup> grade years.

Students can spend “Free” mods in various areas of the building (cafeteria, library, resource room, Cafe321...)

**Q: What about activities outside of school? How do they compare for colleges?**

**A:** Colleges do still like other activities outside of school. Things such as scouts, part-time jobs, church or temple youth groups, lessons or classes, and club sports are all also good ways to show activities for college applications.

**Q: What are options for Before or After school hours meetings or studying at the High School?**

**A:** The library is open after school for a while and there is security at the High School through the evenings.