

**Fort Couch
Middle School**



**2024- 2025
Student/Family Handbook**

FORT COUCH MIDDLE SCHOOL

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<https://ftcouch.uscsd.k12.pa.us/>

FORT COUCH MIDDLE SCHOOL OFFICE PERSONNEL

Ms. Erin Peterson, Principal
Mr. Gordon Mathews, Assistant Principal
Mr. Jace Palmer, School Counselor (Grade 8)
Ms. Jessica Robinson, School Counselor (Grade 7)
Mrs. Sharon Lacey, Head Secretary
Ms. Jill Polfus, Attendance Secretary
Ms. Annette Hansen, School Nurse
Officer Tom White, School Police
Mr. Anthony Krause, Head Custodian

FORT COUCH MIDDLE SCHOOL PTSO OFFICERS 2024-25

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Mrs. Christina Casciani, Secretary
Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor, Board Advisor

District Information

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Dr. Amy Pfender, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Judith Bulazo, Director of Curriculum & Professional Development
Dr. Sharon K. Suritsky, Substitute Director of Special Education
Dr. Lauren Madia, Director of Pupil Services
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Mr. Danny Holzer, Director of Athletics
Mr. Bradley Wilson, Director of Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Jonn Mansfield, Director of Transportation
Mrs. Tina Vojtko, Communications Specialist
Ms. Ashley Lindhurst, Food Service Director
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Minutes from the School Board of Directors monthly meetings can be found on the District's website: <https://www.uscsd.k12.pa.us/information/school-board/school-board-meetings>

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PRINCIPAL'S WELCOME LETTER

August 2024

Dear Fort Couch Students and Families,

Welcome to the 2024-2025 school year at Fort Couch Middle School! We are looking forward to embarking on this new school year with you.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you with an overview of information about the school, curriculum, activities, policies, and procedures. We hope that this handbook will be valuable to you during your time at Fort Couch. Please note that a District Handbook is also available and provides you with district-wide information, required policy notifications, and compliance notices. In the case of a conflict between this supplemental handbook and the District Handbook, the District Handbook will govern.

The educational program at Fort Couch has been developed with a clear understanding of the students' academic, physical, emotional and social characteristics and needs. Additionally, the curriculum and activities allow students to explore and begin to develop their creativity, strengths, and passions. The Fort Couch staff works hard to build connections with students and families to ensure quality relationships and partnerships.

Ultimately, the mission of the school is to provide the best educational experience for all students. The programs of the school aim to be responsive to the needs of all students through various options while striving to achieve and surpass district, state, and national learning standards.

If you have any questions regarding the handbook, or any other school related issues, please call us at 412-833-1600 ext. 3000 for assistance.

We look forward to working with you this school year. The future for students, parents, and staff is full of exciting and challenging opportunities. Enjoy your time at Fort Couch Middle School!

Best wishes,

Erin S. Peterson, Principal

Gordon Mathews, Assistant Principal

UPPER ST. CLAIR SCHOOL DISTRICT MISSION STATEMENT

Developing lifelong learners and responsible citizens for a global society is the mission of the Upper St. Clair School District, served by a responsive and innovative staff who in partnership with the community provides learning experiences that nurture the uniqueness of each child and promotes happiness and success.

STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

You, as a student of the Upper St. Clair Middle School Program, have the right to . . .

- **Grow intellectually** by exposing yourself to ideas and concepts that challenge your ability to think, reason and make decisions;
- **Mature emotionally** while interacting in an environment that nurtures awareness and an understanding of yourself;
- **Become a whole person** by learning from people who have made a commitment to your education and special needs;
- **Develop socially** by modeling accepted social attitudes and social skills;
- **Grow physically** by being an active participant in curricular and extracurricular activities that develop your body and sense of fair play;
- **Express yourself creatively** by sharing your talents and abilities in the Arts;
- **Allow yourself to be helped** through a challenging period in your growth by people with a sincere understanding of your feelings;
- **Understand your fears** knowing that your concerns are natural and shared by everyone;
- **Seek help when you need it** in order to gain a better understanding of your schoolwork;
- **Be yourself** because you are a **special person**.

STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

No student shall be deprived of equal treatment and equal access to the educational program, due process, a presumption of innocence, and free expression and association, in accordance with Board policy and school rules.

It is the responsibility of each student to:

- Be honest and ethical: Respect, Responsibility, Honesty.
- Put forth his/her best efforts in the classroom to develop and improve his/her learning.
- Contribute to making the school a better place in which to learn.
- Exercise proper care when using school equipment.
- Assist in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the school community.
- Be aware of the rules and policies of the school and follow them.
- Attend school daily and report to all classes on time.
- Make-up work when absent from school.
- Respect school property.
- Follow the dress code.

A comprehensive list of student rights and responsibilities can be found in Board Policy **235 - Student Rights and Responsibilities** and [Chapter 12](#) of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code.

COURSE OFFERINGS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

At Fort Couch, we believe the ability to communicate is one of the most important tools students need to live effectively in our society. Language is the means by which we communicate both to express and to receive thoughts. To receive a message, you must perceive the words and comprehend the idea. In our curriculum, emphasis is put on vocabulary expansion through the use of context clues, dictionaries and word analysis. Appreciation and comprehension of written language evolves from the study of various types and styles of written work. Students analyze short stories and informational articles for main ideas, deeper meaning, and author's craft. The author's use of specific details or the manner in which she/he has organized the work, help a student to predict the outcome of a story. The primary objectives are to instruct students in the skills and processes of language which will make them efficient readers, listeners, speakers, and writers, and to make students aware of language as a vehicle through which interests, attitudes and understanding can be developed.

The English Language Arts curriculum is language rich and integrates language arts in the total educational program of our students. The language program includes instruction in reading skills, process writing, literature, language structure, and oral communications.

Reading instruction provides students with extensive work in fiction and nonfiction pieces. Four to eight complete works of fiction are read at each level. Works of fiction are read for vocabulary development, reading comprehension and to develop higher-order, critical thinking skills. Students also use a published vocabulary series. Further, to better meet students' needs, teachers will utilize multiple novels when providing reading instruction. The program is multi-text and exposes the student to a variety of real literature. Teachers may choose from a list of resources, literature texts and activities established by the department to teach the objectives for each level.

English Language Arts is divided into four parts: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Teachers use activities involving each element of language to teach the lesson's objective. Students may dramatize a scene in the story as a way of feeling the intensity of conflict the author creates, or play the role of a character in a novel to better understand the author's use of character traits. What better way to learn the art of persuasion than to write your own newspaper editorials and advertisements? Structure and effectiveness are clarified when a student rewrites a familiar story from a different point of view. Radio and television shows may be used to distinguish fact from fiction.

Students learn different techniques required to preview a work, read for leisure or for detailed study. Students read, write and listen to different types of poetry. Narrative, lyrical and descriptive poetry are also compared. To further their ability to express thought, students are

taught sentence patterns, some grammar usage, and how to organize longer works. Grammar is taught as a means to produce effective writing. Emphasis is placed on function rather than terminology.

A process approach to writing is used to develop students' writing skills. This approach includes composing, rewriting, conferencing, revising, editing, and publishing. Students work to develop their analytical writing skills and to deepen their understanding of prose and poetry that reflect narrative, expository and argumentative modes. All English Language Arts classes at each grade have one instructional level. Teachers will place an emphasis on differentiating their instruction, as multiple texts will be utilized for reading instruction. Students will be assigned text based on their ability level and learning style.

MATH

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards for middle level learners recognizes the need for all students to have broad expertise in mathematics. The NCTM standards advocate improving a student's math performance by devoting more attention to conceptual development, by encouraging independent thinking and by demonstrating math's usefulness through the use of real-life problems and hands-on support materials. The Upper St. Clair Math Program places a vast majority of students on the same pathway with the possibility of taking calculus by their senior year in high school.

We have found that our curriculum meets the needs of most of our students. However, we know that students all learn at different rates. To accommodate these various learning rates, we have a program to help identify students who might need enrichment in math or who may need additional support. Pre-testing occurs at the beginning of each unit to determine enrichment needs. This enrichment may occur for an entire unit or it may occur for individual lessons within that unit. Teachers utilize Panther Time and Period 8 to provide remediation help for students who may need concepts retaught or who may need other second chance learning interventions. Teachers also employ MAP testing to determine the needs of each student and to plan instruction, interventions, and enrichment.

7th GRADE MATH

Students in 7th grade Pre-Algebra study the following three major topics: applied arithmetic, pre-algebra and pre-geometry. The transition to algebra is done by examining three uses of variables: pattern generalization, abbreviations in formulas, and unknowns in real-life contexts. Variables on the number line and coordinate plane are represented. Lessons in geometry focus on measurement, relationships involving lines, angles and polygons and the connection between arithmetic, algebra and measurement. Large and small numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, zero and negative numbers, powers, decimals, percents, scientific notation are

revisited. Problem solving strategies, graphs, combining operations, the Distributive Property, and basic algebra skills complete the transition to Algebra.

An integrated approach lets students focus on one strand while reiterating and introducing others. The curriculum implements the NCTM standards by emphasizing applications, reading and writing, problem solving and technology throughout. Students learn how and when to use math skills, the properties and relationship of numbers, the use of mathematical ideas and how to physically picture mathematical concepts. Emphasis on the application of math skills to real life problems motivates students and provides a context for learning concepts and skills. Students learn to speak the language of math, and skill reinforcement is an integral part of problem-solving practice and review.

8th GRADE MATH

Algebra I is a first year course in algebra that employs geometry, statistics and probability to illustrate the algebra of linear equations and inequalities. Models for arithmetic operations are extended to equations involving variables. Students learn to solve linear sentences and define functions. Probability concepts are studied along with algebraic fractions while heavy manipulative techniques are postponed to later courses.

Contemporary applications in science and personal finance explore curvilinear functions depicting compound interest, parabolas, and quadratic equations. Graphing, the properties of lines and slopes are important to visualizing and organizing data. Reading and problem solving continue to be emphasized throughout the curriculum. Problem-solving strategies are embedded in application settings.

At both grade levels, students who do not demonstrate mastery will be designated to receive a second math lesson during the school day. Teachers will identify these students and will provide these interventions on a daily basis. Conversely, students excelling in math are provided enrichment activities per their pretest results and rate of acquisition. As an integral part of the program, USC incorporates technology including the use of the scientific calculator, computers, Chromebooks, and function graphers. Beginning in the first chapter, scientific calculators are required of all students. Calculators allow students to study a variety of problems in greater depth. Students with computational deficiencies are able to further their mastery of math concepts while building their computational skills. Accelerated and remedial courses are offered at both grade levels depending on student needs.

SCIENCE

At Fort Couch, students not only learn science but experience it through hands-on activities. The program strives to stimulate and foster student interest and excitement for a subject that has become part of daily living in an expanding technological society. Through the use of hands-on

activities, labs, science tools and equipment, the students learn science concepts along with skills and processes needed for scientific thought and inquiry. Each year the students are exposed to at least four different topics.

As part of the regular curriculum, students explore the impact science has on the world. STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) is a focus of the curriculum for learning in the integrated curriculum. Science objectives and activities are regularly integrated with other content areas. Students are asked to make reports, oral presentations, explore global issues and use mathematical reasoning.

7th GRADE SCIENCE UNITS

- **Scientific Method** The scientific method will be a focus along with other experimental techniques. Students will be able to set up their own experiments and control variables.
- **Light** This unit is a standards-based, inquiry-centered unit that was developed by the Smithsonian and the National Academies. This unit allows students to explore the properties of light. Students will understand the origin of light, how it travels, and what happens when it is blocked. An exploration of different types of mirrors and how light acts when it strikes a mirror completes the unit.
- **Cells:** This unit will introduce students to homeostasis of the cell. Students will be taught the correct process in using a microscope to explore cells in animals and plants. Content includes the parts of a cell and cell functions. This experience and information on the cell will be a building block for the next nine weeks: genetics.
- **Genetics and Evolution:** Theories concerning the origin of plants and animals along with the production of mutations, the inheritance of traits and the prediction of a pattern of inheritance and natural selection are explored. Students have the opportunity to discover how their own physical characteristics have been passed down through generations.
- **Earth's Changing Surface & Man's Impact:** Man's impact on the earth's changing surface is explored in this unit. Students examine earthquakes, volcanoes, and other earth processes. Types of faults and the causes of earth movements are deduced. The students will explore the impact of agriculture and pollution on the earth.

8th GRADE SCIENCE UNITS

- **Scientific Method** The scientific method will be a focus along with other experimental techniques. Students will be able to set up their own experiments and control variables.
- **Intro to Physics:** This unit will focus on our physical world along with the scientific laws that govern it. The students will explore through scientific inquiry the topics of kinetic and potential energy, speed, motion, acceleration, forces, work, power, and gravity. Engineering is a focus of this unit with the students designing, building, evaluating and revising engineering challenges using the design cycle.

- ***Intro to Chemistry:*** A focus of this unit will be understanding the properties of matter. Students will identify types of matter based on the physical and chemical characteristics. Using physical properties like density, melting point/freezing point, chemical properties like chemical reactivity the students will identify matter. The periodic table will be used as a tool to understand the sub-atomic structure of the atom. The students will be able to identify characteristics of the elements by the placement on the periodic table.
- ***Astronomy:*** This student will explore the Earth, the moon, the stars, galaxies and the universe. The laws and theories used to govern the physical universe are applied. Students will be researching, observing, calculating, and modeling planetary movements and characteristics. The Hertzsprung-Russell diagram will be used to identify the brightness and magnitude of stars of the galaxies. Models will be used to understand seasons, earth movements, and the effect of different objects in space. The students will explore the challenges of space exploration and colonization today.

SOCIAL STUDIES

A unique feature of the Social Studies Curriculum is the integration of four key Social Studies disciplines (geography, economics, civics, and history). The curriculum is organized into knowledge and skill objectives that engage the student through problem solving, analytical reasoning and writing. Many Social Studies activities are integrated with other curriculum areas.

7th GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

- ***European Foundations of America:*** Students will learn about the major groups and individuals which led to the European exploration and colonization of North America.
- ***Creation of the United States:*** Students will study the establishment of the Thirteen Colonies and their growing tension with Britain. The course will explore the Revolutionary War and the establishment of an independent United States, focusing in particular on the structure and function of the United States Constitution.
- ***Expansion of a Nation:*** Students will understand the growth of the United States, including the causes and effects of territorial expansion across the continent in the early 1800s. The debate over slavery in newly acquired land will be a key point of focus.
- ***Civil War and Reconstruction:*** Students will investigate the war which tore apart the United States, including major events, individuals, and costs of the Civil War. The course will then address the period of Reconstruction, in which various attempts were made to rebuild the nation.

8th GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

- ***Industrialization and Immigration:*** This unit will center on industrialization in the late 1800s and its transformative effects on America and the world. Students will also learn about various factors which led to increased emigration to the United States.

- ***Emerging Power and World War I:*** Students will study the ways in which various nations developed world empires. In addition, students will investigate the steps which led to the outbreak of the Great War and the effects of the conflict itself.
- ***The Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression:*** This unit will explore changes which took place in the decade after the Great War before turning to the Great Depression, in which students will learn the causes of and responses to the economic disaster of the 1930s.
- ***Prewar Years and World War II:*** In the last unit of the year, students will focus their attention on World War II, starting with events and individuals which led to its beginning. The unit will also discuss major events from the war across the globe and its impact on the world.

WORLD LANGUAGE

The middle school World Language program begins with an exploratory program in 5th Grades. Students continue with the language of their choice (French, German, or Spanish) in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades to complete the equivalent of two semesters of high school work. The classes actively involve the students in listening exercises, vocabulary building, reading, writing, grammar, and the development of oral proficiency through specific topics of conversation.

The program is also designed to give students cultural insight into the beliefs and behaviors of the people and cultures represented by each language. Art, history, music, dance, cuisine and the customs of each society are examined through videos, games, cultural event projects, and activities.

Each year the advancements in technology help to bring the students even closer to the people of the world they are studying. The resource programs provide facts and figures instantly to supplement their knowledge of history and geography. The internet offers opportunities to tap information on any number of topics in English and in the world language.

The middle school program hopes to inspire each student to pursue the study of world language throughout their life with education, travel and a continued awareness of the world and its people.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The broad objective of the Physical Education curriculum is to further develop each student physically, mentally and socially to the extent his or her potential ability and interest will allow. Skills and attitudes previously learned are extended. New skills are introduced, preparing the student to effectively participate in the appropriate physical activities in the regular school program, extra-curriculum program, and activities of special interest in the community and school. Adaptive physical education activities are provided for students needing additional assistance in developing muscular growth, coordination and rehabilitation.

Instruction focuses on three areas: basic team sports, lifetime sports, physical fitness. The physical fitness program is an integral part of the curriculum. Students are encouraged to compete against themselves in developing and maintaining good physical fitness. Additional activities are offered before school, during the activity period and as part of the after-school extracurricular activities.

EXPRESSIVE ARTS

The Expressive Arts curriculum affords Fort Couch students the opportunity to learn skills needed to meet the challenges of living in today's global society. The Expressive Arts curriculum incorporates practical, fine and performing arts into one program blending the subject content in each area with required levels of student activity in the form of product and personal performance, fostering art awareness and self-esteem. Each area retains its identity as a unique discipline, but by unifying the program opportunities are provided for social interaction while integrating the skills and objectives of a more traditional program.

7th GRADE EXPRESSIVE ARTS

- **Art:** The focus of art at Fort Couch lies more in process than product. Students will have an opportunity to experience a variety of media and artistic processes, allowing for a more encompassing idea of what it means to create art. Working individually and collaboratively, students will investigate creative projects involving painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramics and various forms of digital art.
- **Music:** Vocal training is used as a basis to cultivate concepts of beat, rhythm, articulation, melody, harmony, tone color, dynamics, form and to develop an appreciation for a variety of styles of music. Students compose a melody. They study the four families of instruments and sound production through the use of oscilloscopes and balloon experiments. Students are encouraged to extend this musical training by joining such extracurricular activities as Band, Chorus or Orchestra.
- **STEAM Design:** STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math) Design is a way to teach how all things relate to each other, in school and in life. Using the design process, students will follow a series of steps to come up with a solution to a problem. Incorporated in this process are creativity and innovation. Students will be given the opportunity to make and create in the Innovation Hub and the Maker Space. The Innovation Hub is a room designed to promote collaboration, communication, problem solving and creativity. The Maker Space allows students to create, make, test, and improve upon their designs.
- **CAPS: Consuming and Producing Successfully:** In CAPS (Consuming and Producing Successfully), students become entrepreneurs by evaluating the world around them, identifying a problem to solve, then creating and building a product-based solution. Students then sell their product or service, evaluating the performance of their business idea, and iterating to incorporate learning. Students capture their learning in a portfolio of artifacts and reflections that document their journey from problem and solution ideation through evaluation of sales data. With

involvement of local mentors and other volunteers, students experience authentic learning. Students leave CAPS having defined, built, and launched a product in the market. Evidence of learning includes a business model canvas, a budget and pricing model for the business, a product name and brand, a pitch deck, communications and marketing material, sales goals, reflections, and student portfolio.

· **Communication Arts:** Students will complete a unit in Communication Arts each respective year. Course content may include studying, analyzing, and practicing different types of communication, including written forms, classroom discussions, the media, and speeches. Students will also develop skills such as fluency, interviewing, outlining, recitation, and presentation. Rhetorical techniques such as literary devices and persuasion techniques will be included.

8th GRADE EXPRESSIVE ARTS

8th Grade Students will participate in each of the rotations through either a set course or electives. All students will complete a six week course in Communication Arts and a six week course in CAPS: Consuming and Producing Successfully. For the areas of Art, Music, STEAM Design, and Band, students will select elective courses of either three or six week rotations.

ADVISOR TIME

The advisor will assume a helping role as an advocate for assigned students by coordinating activities that will promote a sense of belonging, improve interpersonal relationships, and enhance the self-concept of every student.

GUIDANCE

Students participate in a guidance class on a regular basis. During 7th grade, sample guidance class topics include study skills, computer safety, diversity and tolerance, drug and alcohol education, and peer pressure refusal skills. During 8th grade, sample guidance class topics include drug and alcohol education, diversity and tolerance, career exploration, human growth and development, and transitioning to high school.

OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

Because of our belief in nurturance, students are heterogeneously grouped into academic teams. This enables teachers and students to develop a strong sense of bonding. Interdisciplinary teaching is strongly encouraged and the team often engages in whole group activities, which helps develop a sense of identity and belonging. Because the skills and achievement levels of our learners are distributed across a broad continuum, varied methods of instruction and strategies for grouping are used to adequately meet the students' academic needs.

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Fort Couch continues the district's philosophy of continuous education. Each level builds on and reinforces the previous level while preparing students for future academic success. Students enter the middle school program at Boyce with a three-teacher team model. Here at Fort Couch, a four-teacher team and an increased course offering prepares students for the transition to high school. Students receive instruction in a variety of curriculum areas. Students have an opportunity to discover areas of interest and abilities that have not yet emerged.

INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING

These are key words used to describe our curriculum. *Interdisciplinary teaching* first introduced in the elementary schools continues at Fort Couch. Units designed specifically to integrate the various curriculum areas reinforce the importance to construct links between what the student already knows and values and the information that they are expected to learn. Skills learned in English language arts are applied in social studies and science presentations. Mathematical theory is exercised in science, industrial arts and home economics. The Fort Couch *interdisciplinary* curriculum is implemented using a multi-text approach. In addition to traditional instruction and classroom activities, students are provided enrichment or remedial activities as necessary. Teachers from different core academic and resource areas work together to define projects that will further engage the students in the learning process requiring the student to apply the knowledge being learned. Working together as a team, the teachers have the flexibility in their schedule to move and regroup students as needed. Research which has shown that the more meaningful, the more deeply or elaborately processed, the more situated in context and the more rooted in cultural, background, cognitive and personal knowledge the curriculum is, the more readily the child will understand, learn, and remember.

The curriculum allows teachers to educate by repeating, reinforcing and extending similar objectives at each grade level. In science, specific areas of Earth, Life and Physical Sciences are revisited each year beginning in 5th grade with an emphasis on skills, processes, critical thinking and problem solving.

Teachers spark the imagination of an unusually large number of talented and motivated Fort Couch students through specialized grouping and student choice. Each student is looked at individually and provided for as needed.

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE - MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM

This international program has several unique characteristics that may interest some students. While insisting upon thorough study of the various disciplines, the International Baccalaureate MYP accentuates the interrelatedness of them and so advances a holistic view of knowledge. International Baccalaureate has all units of instruction designed via one of the five areas of the interaction: human ingenuity, environments, community and service, approaches to learning, and health and social education. Further, students are encouraged to develop intercultural and international awareness along with a genuine understanding of their own history and traditions. The International Baccalaureate Program places great emphasis on mastery of one's own language as well as another language. Students are required to perform community service as a component of their participation in the program. The MYP spans from grades five through ten. For more detailed information, please visit [International Baccalaureate/ Middle Years Program](#) on our District website.

SCHOOL DAY

The school day at Fort Couch is from 8:55 A.M. 3:35 p.m. to begin dismissal, Monday through Friday. Students should not be in the building before 8:40 A.M. or after 4:00 P.M. unless requested by a teacher, participating in a supervised activity, arriving on an early bus, or waiting for a late bus. Any student who is dropped off prior to 8:40 A.M. needs to report to the cafeteria until 8:40 A.M.

- **Library** - The Library is open from 8:50 A.M. to 3:40 P.M. if the librarian is available. A note will be posted on the library door should the hours change.
- **Nutrition Center** - The Nutrition Center is open for students beginning at 8:25 A.M. Breakfast can be purchased. All students should remain in the nutrition center until 8:45 A.M.

TEAMING

Teaming is the foundation of Fort Couch Middle School. All students are assigned to one of the six teams. All teams are composed of a science, math, social studies, and English language arts teacher. In addition to these classes, students will have a World Language, Expressive Arts, Guidance, and Physical Education class. Students will also take part in the advisory program.

SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Fall Sports (September – October): 7th Grade Football, 8th Grade Football, 7th and 8th Grade Boys & Girls Swimming, 7th and 8th Grade Boys & Girls Cross Country, 7th Grade Girls Volleyball, 8th Grade Girls Volleyball, 7th and 8th Grade Boys Soccer, 7th and 8th Grade Girls Soccer, Intramural Girls Volleyball

Winter 1: 7th and 8th Grade Boys Basketball (November - December), Intramural Boys Basketball, 7th and 8th Grade Wrestling (December – January)

Winter 2: 7th and 8th Grade Girls Basketball (January - February), Intramural Girls Basketball

Spring (April - May): 7th and 8th Grade Boys & Girls Track and Field, 7th and 8th Grade Girls Fast Pitch Softball, 7th and 8th Grade Boys Volleyball

At Fort Couch the Athletic Program's major emphasis is to provide broad-based activities that are an extension of the physical education program. Any student can participate in the after-school activities. The purpose of the athletic program is to provide wholesome physical activity with emphasis on the physical and emotional welfare of the participants. All practices, scrimmages and contests are considered teaching situations. Students have an opportunity to develop skills, sportsmanship, and self-discipline. There is a "no-cut" policy. All students who wish to participate will be assigned to a team. In addition, Fort Couch offers intramural opportunities in volleyball and basketball. These two intramural programs have become exploratory after-school programs which provide all students a chance to be part of a fun, social, and developmental team. While an attempt is made to give all team members playing time, it is not always possible to give all players equal playing time. The coaches are responsible for using their own discretion. Students who wish to participate in these activities must be in good academic standing and must adhere to team rules. Medical examinations are required for participation. Physical form information, schedules, announcements and the athletic fee can be found on the [Fort Couch Athletics webpage](#).

Please refer to the policies below for additional District athletic information.

[Interscholastic Athletics](#) (Policy 123)

123.1 - Concussion Management (Policy 123.1)

123.2 - Sudden Cardiac Arrest (Policy 123.2)

CLUBS

Students at Fort Couch Middle School have the opportunity to participate in a variety of clubs offered during Panther Time. These experiences are not graded and emphasis is placed on good sportsmanship, fair play, creative inquiry, and social and emotional development.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Counseling services are designed to help all students discover their own assets, needs, and interests. The curriculum addresses developmental issues faced by adolescents. The course is non-graded. Guidance class, which meets twice in a six-day rotation, gives the counselors an opportunity to meet individual students. Moreover, the counseling program has an open-door policy to satisfy individual and small group needs.

The role of the counselor is to advocate for students and to serve as the liaison between students, teachers, parents and administration. The counselor may perform duties such as attending team meetings, teaching classes, intervening in a crisis, coordinating test administration, attending parent conferences, scheduling students, and coordinating S3.

FORT FAMILY / USC TIME / OLWEUS BULLYING PREVENTION PROGRAM

Olweus is the most research based and best-known bullying prevention program available to schools. Olweus is a whole-school program that has been proven to reduce and prevent bullying throughout a school setting. Olweus has three main goals to its program: reduce existing bullying problems among students; prevent the development of new bullying problems; and to achieve better peer relations at school. Fort Family / USC Time is Fort Couch's integration of Olweus into Fort Couch programming.

ORCHESTRA, BAND, AND CHORUS

Fort Couch Middle School offers Orchestra, Band, and Chorus. No previous experience is necessary. Small group lessons and elective offerings are provided for students playing a string or band instrument throughout the school year. In addition, ensembles meet during Period 8 on designated days.

Fort Couch also offers an extensive Choral Program that provides for students of all abilities and interest levels. Students have the opportunity to study and perform a variety of choral music and participate in smaller vocal groups.

SOCIALS

The PTSO sponsors school socials throughout the year. Check the website for the dates. Socials are from 7:00 PM to 9:00 P.M. Students must stay at the social until dismissal at 9:00 P.M. unless a parent, or responsible sibling, comes into the school to pick up the student. Socials usually include a D. J., refreshments, and open gymnasium for other activities.

RTI – RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Various layers of intervention are provided to students based on academic and behavioral needs. If a student is struggling academically, the classroom teacher will monitor the student to determine appropriate classroom interventions. If data supports the need, a student may receive additional support from the reading specialist or a math resource teacher. Student performance on the PSSA's and classroom performance are just two pieces of data used to determine intervention and instructional decisions. In the event a student needs additional behavioral support, school counselors will work with the classroom teachers to determine appropriate behavioral interventions.

STUDENT COUNCIL

All students have an opportunity to participate in Fort Couch Middle School's Student Council. At the beginning of the year students submit an application for approval to be a member of the Student Council. Under the leadership of Student Council sponsors, representatives participate in school and community service projects throughout the year. Student Council members must be responsible and enthusiastic students who serve as role models for their peers.

HOMEWORK

The Upper St. Clair School District homework policy is based on educational research. Homework is a necessary supplement that supports and enriches the instructional program. It is most meaningful when it is corrected, discussed, and returned to the students, and when it relates to the concepts and objectives that have already been thoroughly explained and understood by the students.

Students in 7th and 8th grades may spend approximately one and half hours a day on homework. In order to meet the needs of individual students and their ability to perform independent study, homework assignments are gradually increased from the elementary levels to the high school. If you find that your child's workload regularly exceeds this recommended amount, we encourage you to contact your student's teacher. Teachers may deem some assignments as long-term assignments. Such assignments will be due on the date requested by the teacher, unless approval is granted by the teacher prior to the date that the assignment is due.

Because it is important for students this age to have time to explore other outside activities, time is set up within the daily schedule for students to begin their homework. Teachers are available during this time for students who are having trouble with a concept.

HOMEWORK REQUESTS

Prior to contacting the school to request homework; please check Canvas for this information. Because all students are permitted time to make up missed work when they return to school, homework should only be requested if the student is expected to be absent two or more days. Homework for absences due to an educational trip is handled on an individual basis. Parents may access Canvas to view current assignments and projects for the week. Requests for homework can be made by calling the school office at 412-833-1600 extension 3000. Homework will be available for pickup at the end of the day only if the request is made before 9:00 a.m. Requests received after 9:00 a.m. will be available at the end of the following day. Homework may be picked up in the Office.

GRADING SYSTEM

REPORT CARDS AND STUDENT PROGRESS

Students receive report cards each nine weeks. All report cards are delivered to parents and students electronically. Parents must register for Focus accounts to receive this information. The Fort Couch report card provides parents with a wealth of information. The report card is divided into the following categories:

Daily Performance – student performance on class activities and homework (formative assessments)

Academic Knowledge – student achievement of curricular goals based on various types of summative assessments

Attributes of a Successful Learner – student demonstration of work and behavior habits

Overall Performance – An overall summary of the student performance

Student grades are updated at least every two weeks via Canvas. Report Cards and progress reports are available at specific dates throughout the school year via Focus.

Guidelines for Use of the O-G-S-N Grading System

The following characteristics must be kept in mind when utilizing the O-G-S-N Grading System.

This grading system values:

PERFORMANCE that reflects achievement based on the student's ability as opposed to achievement based on an external measurement.

SUBJECTIVE JUDGMENT of the student that is substantiated with objective measures as evidence, and sensitive to the student's growth.

PROGRESS that reflects a comparison with the student's past individual work.

GLOBAL IMPACT that presents the child not in an isolated instance, but a continuation of an ongoing developmental process.

This grading system does not value:

Evaluation on daily work that uses the O-G-S-N marks. These marks should only be used on report cards and major projects.

Direct or subtle connections between the O-G-S-N marks and scores received on tests.

Direct or subtle connections between the O-G-S-N marks and the traditional A-B-C-D marks, percentage points or point breakdowns.

Direct or subtle connections between the O-G-S-N marks and behavior modification needs.

It is acceptable to use total number correct out of total number; percentage points; computer grade book; and other methods of recording the objective data for the teacher's grade book.

These recording procedures should not be equated to the O-G-S-N marks, but should be accompanied by a written comment.

INCOMPLETE (I) GRADE

In unusual circumstances (extended illness, death in the family, etc.) teachers may issue a temporary “I” grade. Students are expected to contact the teacher and arrange for work to be completed. Students have ten school days after the end of the nine-week period to complete this work. Failure to complete required work may result in an “N” grade.

PLANNED PROGRAM OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

The planned program of standardized testing by the District is collected and maintained by representational consent and is shown below. The results of these tests, as well as the results of aptitude and achievement tests taken by the individual student on a voluntary basis and required for admission into post-secondary education institutions, are maintained and made a part of the record. Should you wish to examine the record, you may arrange to do so by making an appointment with your child’s principal or counselor. For specific information regarding matters pertaining to school records, parents or eligible students may contact the principal of the school in which the student is enrolled.

TESTING

Students at Fort Couch take PSSA Testing in the Spring. Both 7th and 8th grades take ELA and Mathematics. Students in 8th grade take the Science PSSA test. In addition, those students in Algebra I take the Algebra Keystone. Please visit the PDE website for the most current information regarding assessments in Pennsylvania public schools. Please avoid making doctor appointments, planning trips and student absences during the testing window. If it is unavoidable and your child must be absent from school, please contact the school counselor immediately.

PSSA TESTING WINDOW

The PSSA testing window for this school year is as follows:

- English Language Arts April 21 - 25, 2025
- Mathematics, Science and Make Ups April 28 - May 2, 2025
- Make Ups May 5 - 9, 2025

KEYSTONE TESTING WINDOW

The Keystone testing window for this school year is as follows:

- Keystones (Algebra I) May 19 & 21, 2025

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

CANVAS

Canvas is the District-wide learning management system. This system is used to provide parents with a common website to find all student learning materials and homework assignments for their children. Information about creating parent accounts will be provided through the District website, and in the Back-to-School information that all families receive. Please visit Academics- Canvas on our District website for more information, including how-to instructions for setting up a parent account.

DISTRICT WEBSITE

Additional district information is available through the website www.uscsd.k12.pa.us. This includes, but is not limited to, school board meeting minutes, district-wide announcements and upcoming events.

EMAIL

Each teacher has an email account. Parents are encouraged to use this form of communication. Please refer to the Staff Directory on the District website or contact the office if you need a specific teacher's email address. The Fort Couch website is also used as a means to communicate with parents.

OPEN HOUSE

Fall and spring open houses are held during the school year. Parents are invited during the evening to view the school and meet the teachers. Brief programs are held in each classroom to outline the curriculum and programs.

OTHER MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

Upper St. Clair schools appreciate the role of the parent in a student's education and extend great effort to keep parents and residents informed. All USC Board of School Directors general meetings and committee meetings are open to the public with time for public comment. A meeting notice and agenda for each meeting, and the approved minutes are posted on the District's website. In addition, a video recording for each meeting can be accessed online.

The School District sends a Weekly Recap email to all USCS D families and staff members every Friday. The School District and USC Township partner to produce a quarterly magazine - USC Today magazine - which is mailed to all homes and businesses in the township.

Many public forums exist for parents to voice their opinions and concerns to administration and faculty in a relaxed atmosphere. Monthly PTSO meetings are attended by the principals and a teacher representative.

PARENT CONFERENCES

Parent conferences are scheduled with teachers on an as-needed basis. Conferences can be initiated by the teacher or parent. Teachers will generally initiate contact with a parent once they develop a concern relative to student academic performance or student behavior. Parents are encouraged to monitor Canvas upon receiving a message that a new report is available. Time is available at the beginning of most school days for parent conferences. Parents are welcome and encouraged to call the school at (412) 833-1600 ext. 3000 and arrange a parent-teacher conference at any time to discuss a student's needs or a topic of mutual interest. The school secretary will schedule the meetings at a time that is mutually convenient to both the parents and teachers.

School counselors, all faculty members, and the principals are available to meet with parents. Parents are asked to refrain from impromptu conferences at such times as PTSO meetings, class trips, and open houses. Experience has shown that a conference in a scheduled setting is more productive.

PARENT / COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS

Parents are active participants involved in the daily functioning of Fort Couch Middle School. All volunteers must have updated clearances on file at Central Office to be approved as a volunteer in any building throughout the school district. Parents are encouraged to contact the PTSO if interested in providing assistance or volunteering in the school. More detailed information regarding the process for obtaining and/or updating clearance can be found at [Volunteers & Required Clearances](#) on the District website.

PARENT TEACHER STUDENT ORGANIZATION (PTSO)

The Fort Couch Middle School PTSO has a long tradition of supporting various education, extra-curricular and social aspects of being a middle school student in Upper St. Clair. The majority of PTSO energies are directed towards the students. Recognizing the need for students of this age to socialize, PTSO tries to give them every opportunity to interact and have fun. PTSO sponsors student government, Team & Academic Enhancement funds, and charity activities such as *Caught Ya Being Good*, as well school clubs and the traditional evening Socials. PTSO advisors work with students on projects such as Reach Out and the Fort Couch YearBook. In the Spring the PTSO offers parents opportunities to learn more about the 8th grade transition to the High School. Via support of and cooperation with USC PTC, they sponsor seminars with the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) Committee and the Partners in Education (PIE) Committee as well as Open Mics with the superintendent. The PTSO is also present for the Fall and Spring Open Houses, provides funding to the Fort Couch musical education programs Band, Chorus, and Orchestra, and supports staff appreciation events throughout the year.

There are *no traditional fund-raisers* at Fort Couch, so your student will not be asked to sell anything to raise money for the PTSO. The annual Activity Fee is \$40.00 per student. The fee provides students free admission to all PTSO evening socials and many school and classroom activities, as well as annual family membership to the PTSO. Monthly PTSO meetings are open to everyone interested in their common objectives, and are attended by the building principals and a teacher representative. Meetings are held the third Tuesday of each month at 11:00 a.m. Check the school website for specific details.

REPORT CARDS

Report cards are posted on FOCUS and they are distributed via email at the end of each nine weeks. If you are unable to access your child's Report Card, please contact the Fort Couch Middle School Main Office at 412-833-1600 x3000 for assistance.

USC PTC

USC Parent Teacher Council meets the first Wednesday of each month at various locations in the USC School District. PTC is composed of representatives from each USC school, PTA and PTSO unit Presidents, the Superintendent of Schools and School Board members, for the purpose of sharing news, ideas and concerns.

Acting as the core of PTA and PTSO activities in the school district, PTC coordinates common projects such as the Partners In Education Committee, the T.I.P. or Together In Parenting Committee and the Reflections Program.

VISITING

School district policy requires that all visitors report to the main office before going to any part of the building. This policy has been created to avoid unnecessary interruption of classes and to protect the students in the building from strangers.

VOICE MAIL

Each teacher has voicemail. Parents can leave a message with the teacher. A directory is provided at the beginning of each year as well as on the Fort Couch webpage. In order to not interrupt teachers during class, please call the secretary to be connected directly to the individual teacher's voicemail.

DISTRICT PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students have the responsibility to respect the intellectual and academic property and activities of themselves and others. Cheating, plagiarism, vandalism, theft, or computer tampering will not be tolerated.

ADDRESS CHANGE

Any student having a temporary or permanent address change during the school year should notify the Fort Couch attendance office.

DRESS CODE FOR STUDENTS

The students, faculty and administration believe that student dress is primarily the responsibility of the family and that the school district must support the efforts of our parents in this enterprise. We have confidence that our students and parents will make appropriate decisions on both school attire and appearance. Students must wear styles and clothing which do not constitute a health or safety hazard, and do not cause a substantial disruption of the school program or interfere with the rights of others and does not cause damage to school property or school buses. However, it remains the final decision of the school in cases of dress code abuses. Students may be required to wear prescribed clothing in specific classes such as gym, art, science laboratory, etc. Students are not permitted to wear hats while in the building during school hours.

HAND WASHING/ HYGIENE

Students are encouraged to wash their hands whenever possible during the school day as a practice in good hygiene. When hand washing is not possible, hand wipes or sanitizer are good substitutes.

LOCKERS

Each student is assigned a locker. Students should not tell other students their locker combinations. If valuables are taken from a student's locker, the student should report it to the office. It is the student's responsibility to keep his/her locker clean. Students should not force the doors closed. **Lockers are for the use of a single occupant. Students are not permitted to share their lockers.**

While students are allowed the private use of a locker at Fort Couch, the **lockers remain the property of the school**. Lockers may be opened by authorized personnel as necessary for the safety and well-being of the school community. **Students are strongly encouraged to bring locks for their lockers.**

NUTRITION CENTER

An A la Carte breakfast is available for the students Monday through Friday from @ 8:20 AM – 8:50 AM. To encourage good nutrition, a well-balanced lunch is offered at a reasonable price. Nutrition Center menus for breakfast and lunch are published monthly for students to view on the website. A hot entree and sandwich are offered daily as well as soup and salads, bagels, cold cuts, yogurt and milk. A la Carte items can also be purchased from the snack line. Students may also bring their own lunches.

The Nutrition Center operates on a debit system. Parents may add money directly to their student's account via schoolcafe.com. Parents can establish spending and food limits by notifying the nutrition center manager.

Nutrition Center rules have been set up so that students may eat in a clean, orderly, and relaxed climate.

Rules for the Nutrition Center:

1. Do not cut in line.
2. Do not pressure other students for money or food.
3. Dispose of all lunch litter in wastebaskets.
4. Behave courteously. Talk in a normal tone and refrain from disruptive behavior.
5. Clean your table for the next group before leaving the nutrition center.
6. Remain on the bottom floor during the lunch period.

If the above rules are not followed, appropriate disciplinary measures will be taken.

OPENING EXERCISES / PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

District schools shall provide opening exercises that include a salute to the flag and/or recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance or the National Anthem. Students may decline to recite the Pledge of Allegiance or National Anthem and to salute the flag on the basis of personal belief or religious conviction. Students who choose to refrain from such participation shall respect the rights and interests of classmates who do participate.

PHOTO REFUSAL

Photos and videotape footage of Upper St. Clair students involved in various school activities are often used as part of the district's community relations program. Photographs/videotape may be used in district publications, video productions, newspapers, television and the district and individual classroom websites. On websites, if the student is identified at all, just the first name will be used. If for any reason you do not want photographs or videotape of your child used in publications, video production or web sites, please indicate in the FOCUS Portal forms and notify the school office.

PICTURES

A professional photographer takes pictures of Fort Couch students during the fall each year. Parents will receive instructions about the procedure to purchase these pictures if there is an interest. There is a make-up session for students absent the day pictures are originally taken.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

At Fort Couch Middle School, we strive to teach all students to work and grow together in a mutually respectful school environment. Students are expected to **Be responsible, Be respectful, Be prepared, Be productive, and Be safe** in their daily interactions with adults, peers, and each other.

STUDENT RECORDS

Student Cumulative Records include report cards and progress reports as well as copies of standardized assessment scores, other test scores, a picture of the student, and other pertinent educational information.

A student's Permanent File includes only the student's standardized assessment scores, final grades for each level, attendance records including records of tardiness and record of graduation. Parents have the right to view or copy these records.

Health records are kept as part of the cumulative records and passed on to other schools in the district.

Parents are responsible to provide the school with all pertinent legal information including child custody.

TRANSPORTATION

The School District provides regular daily transportation to and from school for all students participating in the regular curriculum during the school year. However, parents must provide transportation for their children when they participate in other activities. After regular school hours, including extramural and intramural sports and summer school.

Bus assignments and bus stops based on the student's home address are sent home in August. Requests for consideration of unique transportation needs such as students wishing to walk, and handicapped students must be made in writing to the building principal. Forms are available in the school office.

Students should ride assigned buses, boarding and departing only at their designated bus stop. It is important that students be at their assigned stop at least five minutes before pick-up time. School buses may be delayed at times due to heavy traffic, severe icing conditions or other

unexpected problems. Students should generally remain at the bus stop until the bus arrives.

School buses will complete their scheduled run no matter how late it may become. If weather conditions are severe, students may return to their homes after waiting 20 minutes. Parents are urged to arrange transportation to school in these emergency situations for their children if possible. Students absent because of lack of transportation will be excused under the urgent reason clause of the Pennsylvania School Code.

Concerns regarding bus policies should be forwarded to the Transportation Department at the Bus Garage. When writing to the Transportation Department, please include your name, school, date, bus number and bus stop. The telephone number for the bus garage is 412-833-1600 ext. 3450.

WALKER AND CAR RIDERS

Parents who choose to drive their children to or from school during regular school hours, should drop off/pick up their student in the front of the school. Parents choosing to have their student walk home from school should follow the same procedure as those choosing to drive their students.

SCHOOL BUS DISCIPLINE

All students shall be subject to disciplinary action for all acts of disobedience or misconduct, as outlined in School District Policy, while riding school buses to and from school and at the bus stop. The bus driver shall be responsible for maintaining order in the school bus. In the event of misconduct by any student, the driver shall immediately report such misconduct to the Director of Transportation or the School Principal where the student is in attendance. If disciplinary action is recommended, a written report of misconduct shall be filed. The School Principal will follow established School District policy when dealing with bus misconduct.

Bus Rider Rules: All school rules apply while on school district buses.

1. Students should be on time at their designated school bus stops and should wait until the bus comes to a complete stop before attempting to enter.
2. Students should keep their hands and heads inside the bus at all times while on the bus.
3. Students should talk in a quiet and polite manner refraining from loud talking and laughing that might distract the driver's attention and cause a hazardous driving situation.
4. Students should never tamper with the bus and related equipment.
5. Students should remain seated in their seats at all times.
6. Students should not throw anything in or out of the bus windows.
7. Students are expected to act in a courteous and respectful manner to other riders including their fellow students and to the bus driver.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND SCHOOL SAFETY

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Safety and security of the Upper St. Clair School District's students, staff, visitors and facilities is a high priority. The District is committed to following best practices in the area of school safety. The Chief of School Police leads the security function and is the school safety and security coordinator. Experienced, armed school police officers who are all Act 120 certified are located in every elementary and middle school building. In addition, two assigned school police officers and two Act 235 certified school security officers are located at the high school. School police contact information can be found on the District website under the Safety banner. Chief of School Police Sean Bryson can be reached at 412-833-1600 ext. 2560.

SCHOOL SAFETY - VISITORS

The safety of students and staff is a priority. The school maintains a comprehensive security plan. Entrance to the building should be made through the front doors (located on the field side). The building has been equipped with entrance cameras and entrance buttons. Visitors must identify themselves and the purpose of their visit before being admitted. Visitors will be registered through the Raptor system to obtain a visitor pass. **Students will only be released to parents or guardians. All visitors will be required to show identification.**

FIRE DRILLS

A fire evacuation plan is posted in each room. Students should study the plan and become familiar with it. When the fire alarm sounds, students will immediately stand and form two lines as they leave the room. No one is to pass another person or break the line. Running is not permitted. The first students to reach an outside door are to hold it open until everyone has left the building.

Students are not permitted to talk during a fire drill and are to remain at least 50 feet away from the building until the signal is given to re-enter. No one is to return to the building until a principal authorizes such. Students must stay with their assigned teacher in an assigned area during the drill.

EMERGENCY DRILLS

The school has an emergency response plan. Various emergency situations including severe weather, evacuations, and lock-downs are included in this plan. Students will be informed and instructed by their teachers as to the appropriate response and action to take during these drills. Emergency codes will be communicated to the entire building to inform them of the emergency situation.

EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING

The USCSD Parent Alert System and Emergency School Closings – The USCSD Parent Alert System will be used to communicate weather-related as well as non-weather-related delays and/or cancellations via email and automated phone calls.

Emergency phone numbers for the Parent Alert System are requested when “Back to School Online” information is completed in mid-August. If you have additions or changes to your emergency numbers, please contact your child’s school office.

The School District will also communicate delays and cancellations through various media resources:

- USCSD website: www.uscsd.k12.pa.us
- USCSD social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter): @uscschools
- Local television stations: KDKA, WTAE, WPXI
- Local media websites

ATTENDANCE

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Upper St. Clair School district has a comprehensive school attendance policy that can be found in the District Handbook. Certain school specific times and information is included below for your convenience.

ABSENCES

Families are expected to turn in a note within three days of a student's return to school following an absence. The note can be brought to the office or emailed to fcattendance@uscisd.k12.pa.us.

TARDIES

Any student entering school after the official beginning time must report to the attendance office to obtain a class admission slip. Any student who is tardy more than ten (10) days without proper medical documentation may be required to submit a doctor's note for subsequent excused tardiness. The school principal will notify parents when the child has accumulated four unexcused tardies. Disciplinary consequences may be assigned.

EARLY DISMISSAL

Parents are requested to schedule all appointments for their children before or after the regular school day. If it is essential that such appointments be scheduled during the school day, the parents must submit a note or email the Attendance Office requesting an early dismissal. In the morning, students will find a table in the front foyer as they enter school where they are able to hand in their early dismissal slip.

The following should be included:

- Student's name
- Date and time of early dismissal
- Reason for early dismissal
- Signature of parent/guardian

The attendance office will email the student's teachers alerting them of the early dismissal. It is the responsibility of the student to remind the teacher when it is time for the early dismissal. Parents/Caregivers MUST come into the school to sign out the student.

ATTENDANCE TIMES

Students will be credited with full day attendance if they arrive before 10:25 AM and do not leave until after 2:10 PM. Students will be credited with a half-day absence if they arrive or leave between 10:25 AM and 2:10 PM. Students will be considered absent for the entire day if they leave before 10:25 AM or arrive after 2:10 PM.

PRE-APPROVED ABSENCES

The Administration recognizes that middle school-age children will occasionally be absent from school attending an educational trip/ tour with family or other organizations. If parents/guardians know that their child will be absent from school, it is required to complete an **Educational Trip Form**. This form may be obtained from the Fort Couch Middle School Main Office staff or by visiting our website: [Educational Trip Form](#). The excused absence form is to be completed and submitted for approval to the Main Office **at least one week prior** to the intended date of absence. The Attendance Secretary will contact the parent/guardian only if the request is denied.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN CONFERENCE (SAIC)

Parents/Guardians will be notified in writing and by phone of the scheduled School Attendance Improvement Plan Conference (SAIC).

Schools must create attendance improvement plans prior to referring truancy to the courts. A school attendance improvement conference is defined as a conference where the child's absences and reasons for the absences are examined in an effort to improve attendance with or without additional services. The conference will include the following individuals:

- The child
- The person in parental relation to the child
- Other individuals identified by the person in parental relation who may be a resource (e.g., grandparent, sibling, family friend, advocate, etc.)
- Appropriate school personnel
- Recommended service providers (case managers, behavioral health providers, etc.)

The school must hold the conference even if the parent or guardian declines to participate or fails to attend after the school provides advance written notice and makes attempts to communicate via telephone. A legal requirement does not exist for either the child or parent to attend the conference. The school must document the outcome of any attendance improvement conference in a written attendance improvement plan. Schools may not take further legal action to address unexcused absences until after the date of the scheduled attendance improvement conference has passed.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY / RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION

Provisions are to be made in each school to excuse pupils from school for observance of bona fide religious holidays. A pupil's absence from school for bona fide religious holidays shall be recorded as a "Religious" absence.

MISCELLANEOUS

DAMAGED ITEMS

Students are responsible for all items assigned to or used by them. They will be required to reimburse the School District for anything lost, damaged, or defaced. This includes texts, library books, school materials, facilities, computers, Chromebooks, and school property.

WATER BOTTLES

All students and staff have access to water fountain filling stations throughout the school building. Our water fountains are cleaned regularly, properly maintained, and accessible to everyone. We recognize that students may need additional hydration throughout the school day. Students are permitted to have refillable water bottles in class. At the discretion of the classroom teacher, students may lose this privilege if the water bottle becomes a distraction to the learning environment.

General Guidelines for Water Bottle Usage at Fort Couch:

- Students are permitted to carry water bottles at Fort Couch Middle School
- Students are only permitted to have WATER in the water bottle
- Reusable/ refillable bottles are preferred
- If the water bottle is interfering with the learning of the student/ other students the teacher will ask the student to remove the water bottle from the classroom (i.e. put the bottle in their locker)
- Water bottles should be kept under the students' desks and away from any technology and / or device

SCHOOL TRANSFERS

Advance written notification from a parent/guardian must be provided if a student intends to transfer to another school. Contact the Attendance Secretary for additional information.

TELEPHONE/CELL PHONE CALLS

Telephone calls to the school requesting that messages from parents be delivered to students should be restricted to emergency situations only. We encourage students to refrain from calling home during the school day. However, if a student needs to call home, he or she must come to the office.

Students are not permitted to use cell phones during the school day unless allowed by staff. Cell Phones must remain in the students' backpacks in their lockers. Disciplinary action may be taken if a student is using a phone in school when not permitted.

DISTRICT HANDBOOK POLICIES

The following information can be found in the Upper St. Clair District Handbook. The handbook, along with District policies, are available on the [District website](#).

School Closings and Delays

Flexible Instruction Day

Standardized Testing

Attendance

Code of Student Conduct

Additional Student Conduct Policies

Health and Wellness

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Student Services

Technology

Compliance Notifications

TITLE IX AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

Upper St. Clair School District does not discriminate on the basis of sex and further prohibits discrimination in all education programs and activities operated by the District, including in its admission and employment practices as required by Title IX.

Inquiries regarding the application of Title IX and its implementing regulations may be made to a District Title IX Coordinator, or the Office of Civil Rights, or both.

The Title IX Coordinators/Compliance Officers are:

For Employees:

Dr. Amy Pfender

apfender@uscscd.k12.pa.us

412-833-1600, ext. 2062

For Students:

Dr. Lauren Madia

lmadia@uscscd.k12.pa.us

412-833-1660, ext. 2113

A copy of the [Nondiscrimination Policy and Grievance Procedures](#) may be found on the District's publicly accessible website.

Any information regarding conduct that may constitute sex discrimination under Title IX, as well as complaints of sex discrimination under Title IX may be reported to Dr. Amy Pfender (Employees) or Dr. Lauren Madia (Students), via the contact information provided above.

NON-DISCRIMINATION NOTICE

The Upper St. Clair School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex/gender, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The Director of Pupil Services, Dr. Lauren Madia, has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies for students and can be reached using the contact information listed below.