

Program of Studies Updates for 2026-2027

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Highlands Middle School is designed to facilitate a smooth transition for all children from childhood to adolescence. Over these four years, students will have opportunities to explore many disciplines, taught by a strong core of teachers who collaborate to integrate their courses. The administrators, teachers, and counselors will provide constructive guidance and support to each student as they explore a changing world and themselves.

This Program of Studies provides an overview of the Highlands Middle School curriculum, including brief descriptions of the planned courses for each grade. It also outlines services provided to students by the School Counseling Department. Please review the following guide. If you have questions, please contact any of the people listed below:

Highlands Middle School Administration/Staff

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Mr. Matthew Dunker (Assistant Principal)	724-226-2400 x3610
Ms. Holly Paris (Dean of Students)	724-226-2400 x3615
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Mrs. Julie Seitz-Allman (School Counselor Gr. 5 & 6)	724-226-2400 x3651
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Ms. Aliza Zelina (Nurse)	724-226-2400 x3700

The Middle School “Team” Concept

The team concept has proven effective in middle schools nationwide. At Highlands Middle School, students in grades five through eight are assigned to one of two teams at each grade level. Each team has its own group of teachers who teach the required subjects (language arts, reading, math, science, and social studies). Students rotate among their team teachers throughout the school day. This approach ensures that no student goes unnoticed.

This type of team structure:

- Allows students to receive instruction in their academic subjects in a designated area for their grade level.
- Provides a small-group, nurturing environment while gradually exposing students to a larger, upper-grade-level school.
- Allows interdisciplinary instruction and fosters a community that supports meaningful relationships between students and teachers.

Highlands Middle School Mission Statement

The Highlands Middle School is a unified community committed to providing its students with opportunities to master basic skills, develop a positive self-image, and foster their academic, social, and emotional growth.

Major Goals of the Middle School

1. Provide students with skills to cope with everyday pressure.
2. Encourage students to respect differences among their peers.
3. Encourage open communication between the school and the home.
4. Stimulate career awareness in students.
5. Develop decision-making skills in students.
6. Provide students with the opportunity to learn and use independent study skills.
7. Provide students with the opportunity to develop sound citizenship skills.
8. Recognize that reading, writing, and computing are essential skills for success in our society and that they are not limited to any one academic discipline but are a shared responsibility of students and teachers.
9. Assist in the development of academic, social, aesthetic, emotional, and physical skills.
10. Encourage students to become increasingly self-directed, moving from dependent childhood to self-actualizing adolescence.

School Counseling Services

The mission of the Highlands Middle School Counseling Department is to provide a comprehensive, developmental program that promotes the academic, career, and personal/social development of all students. Our counseling program is committed to collaborating with educators, parents, and community members to ensure that all students have access to and are prepared with the knowledge and skills to become productive, self-managing members of society.

Counselors also prepare eighth-grade students for the high school scheduling process. They work with the high school counselors to help ensure a smooth transition from middle school to high school.

Bully Prevention Program

The Highlands School District is committed to providing all students and employees with the right to a safe and civil educational environment free from harassment and bullying. The district recognizes that bullying interferes with the learning process and may impede students' academic, vocational, and social and/or emotional development.

The Middle School's approach to bullying prevention is designed to create a safe, caring school environment where the power rests with the caring majority, not the bullies. A person is being bullied or victimized when they are subjected to negative actions by one or more people over time.

Communication is a key component in preventing bullying in schools. Please speak with the nearest adult if you feel intimidated, threatened, or harassed at Highlands Middle School. We will investigate the situation, hold the bully accountable, support the victim, and train bystanders to stand up to bullying. This is a key concept in our social-emotional program, Second Step, and Mind Hacks.

College and Career Readiness

Highlands Middle School integrates Pennsylvania's Career Standards into students' daily coursework. This instruction supports career awareness and preparation, career acquisition, career retention and advancement, and entrepreneurship. Our teachers and school counselors collect evidence of this learning and help students create a Future Ready portfolio that follows them to high school.

Second Step: Student Success through Prevention

Highlands Middle School uses the Second Step program to teach students empathy, group work skills, conflict resolution, and goal setting. Our students learn these lessons through direct instruction from their homeroom teachers and apply them to their everyday experiences.

MindHacks is designed for our 6th-grade students and uses DBT principles to build mindful practices in middle school students through a curriculum developed in partnership with UPMC Western Behavioral Health, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU3), and the Citrone 33

Foundation. We hope to develop skills and a healthy mindset in students to enhance interpersonal relationships and connectedness, build positive coping strategies, and improve overall wellness.

PSSAs and Keystone Exams

Currently, students in grades 3-8 are required to take PSSA tests in the spring of each school year. Additionally, students are required to take Keystone Exams as end-of-course tests in Algebra I, Biology, and Literature. Because some of our students take Algebra IB during their middle school years, the Algebra I Keystone Exam will be administered to them. It is a graduation requirement that students demonstrate proficiency on the Algebra I, Biology, and Literature Keystone Exams.

Interactive Media Center Overview

The libraries of the Highlands School District operate as a single, continuous unit, from elementary through high school, to provide students and teachers with educational materials that supplement and enrich the school curriculum. The libraries also provide incentives for individual growth in specific areas of study and in the use of leisure time.

Highlands also partners with the Community Library of Allegheny Valley, which provides services, programs, and seminars to students and their families.

The mission of the Highlands Middle School Media Center is to ensure that students become lifelong learners and effective users of ideas and information. As the middle school library transitions to the Highlands Interactive Media Center, students will have evolving opportunities to enrich their education across all subject areas and interests.

Support Services

Gifted Education (GATE)

The Highlands School District provides opportunities that promote the growth of the skills and knowledge necessary for students identified as gifted to achieve their potential and fulfill their future roles in our ever-changing global society. Highlands recognizes the unique abilities, talents, interests, and needs of students who require specially designed instruction.

Health Services

In addition to caring for students in need, our school nurse coordinates annual health screenings and dental and medical exams, administers medications, and maintains student health records and immunization records.

Highlands Virtual Academy

In partnership with Waterfront Learning, Highlands School District teachers facilitate online classes in core subjects for students in grades 7 and 8. This platform enables students to study English language arts, math, social studies, and science outside the school building while still receiving support from Highlands' teachers. School counselors can answer questions and assist students in enrolling in this program.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS for academics and behavior is a framework Highlands Middle School uses to provide targeted support to struggling students. It focuses on the "whole child." MTSS supports academic growth and achievement while also addressing other areas, including behavior, social and emotional needs, and absenteeism. The multi-tiered supports are a significant part of MTSS. These tiers increase in intensity from one level to the next. The MTSS model helps students in the regular education setting receive interventions.

At Highlands, MTSS includes standards-aligned, culturally responsive, high-quality core instruction; universal screening; data-based decision-making; tiered services and supports; family engagement; central and building-level leadership; and professional learning. MTSS is a broad set of evidence-based practices designed to help ALL students achieve continuous academic and behavioral success.

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS) is based on a problem-solving model and aims to prevent inappropriate behavior by teaching and reinforcing appropriate behaviors (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, 2007). PBIS is a process that aligns with the core principles of MTSS. PBIS offers a range of interventions that are systematically applied to students based on their demonstrated level of need and addresses the role of the environment in the development and improvement of behavior problems. Both MTSS and PBIS are grounded in differentiated instruction. Each approach identifies the critical factors and components required at the universal (Tier 1), targeted group (Tier 2), and individual (Tier 3) levels.

Special Education Services

It is the policy of the Highlands School District that every child who qualifies for special education services receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). To the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities will be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Student placement decisions are made by the IEP team, which includes the parents.

After all evaluations are completed, an Evaluation Report will be compiled with parent involvement. It will include specific recommendations for interventions to address the child's identified needs.

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) will be developed to provide specially designed instruction for the student. The IEP Team consists of the parent, the principal, the special education teacher, and a regular education teacher.

Student Assistance Program (SAP)

The Pennsylvania Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a systematic process that uses effective, accountable professional techniques to mobilize school resources to remove barriers to learning and, when the problem is beyond the scope of the school, to assist the parent/guardian and student with information so they may access services in the community. SAP is designed to help identify issues, including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health issues, that pose a barrier to a student's success. The primary goal of the Student Assistance Program is to help students overcome these barriers so they may achieve, advance, and remain in school.

Student Council/Rambassadors

Student Council and Rambassadors offer students in grades 5-8 the opportunity to actively participate in school-wide initiatives, support community causes, share their perspectives, and see democracy in action. While representing Highlands Middle School, these student leaders will assume greater responsibility, increase their pride in their school, and enhance their awareness of local and global events.

Purpose

- To provide a channel of communication between students and faculty.
- To provide students with a forum for discussing school problems and other student concerns.
- To provide students with experiences in representative government and group processes.
- To promote school spirit through student involvement in school projects.

Grading Guidelines

1. It is recommended that students who earn less than 70% in the first, second, or third marking period in a core class request tutoring or support from their Team's teachers and/or their school counselors.
2. Students who do not earn a passing grade in any core course must meet with the school counselor or principal to complete the course in summer school. The grade earned in summer school will not replace the original grade earned during the regular school term. Both grades will be entered on the permanent record, with a notation indicating the summer school grade.
3. Students who have not earned a passing grade may be ineligible to participate in extracurricular activities, including sports, field trips, and other school events.

Percentage Grading System

Percentage grades are used for each nine-week grading period, as well as for semester and final averages, for all grade 7 and grade 8 students. The percentage grade earned in class will appear on the report card. The percentage grade earned in all classes will be included in a student's grade point average. The current percentage scale (90, 80, 70, 60) will be used.

Standards-Based Grading

Our grade 5 and grade 6 classrooms use standards-based grading. Standards-based grading (SBG) is an assessment system that measures student proficiency against specific learning standards rather than traditional point-based grading. It focuses on students' mastery of skills and concepts and provides clear feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. SBG promotes growth by allowing students to revisit and improve their understanding, emphasizing learning progress over cumulative averages.

Scheduling

The administration reserves the right to drop and add courses and to adjust students' schedules based on student enrollment, teacher recommendations, teacher availability, and standardized test scores.

SCHEDULE CHANGES: Due to scheduling conflicts, preliminary schedules may need to be adjusted. If a conflict arises, counselors will discuss available options before the start of the next school year. Occasionally, students are contacted over the summer to resolve conflicts. Schedule changes after the start of the school year will be considered only after a principal has communicated with the parent/guardian and approved the change.

Information on Course Selection

ADVANCED MATH

Several components are considered when recommending students for advanced math classes. These components include previous course grades, teacher recommendations, standardized test scores, and homework completion. Once recommended, students must maintain an average of at least 80%, as defined by the math department rubric, to remain in advanced math.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

If a student is failing (score below 60%) in two academic subjects in a given week, they will be ineligible to participate the following week.

Grade Five Course Listing

<u>Courses</u>	<u>Periods</u>	<u>Weeks</u>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 5	5	36
MATHEMATICS 5	5	36
SCIENCE 5	5	36
SOCIAL STUDIES	5	36
RELATED ARTS CLASSES	5	18/36

Grade Five Course Listing

5th GRADE REQUIRED COURSES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 5: This course helps students develop a strong personal voice in their writing. This is demonstrated by their sometimes injecting humor into their narratives and supporting their opinions with credible reasons. Students use precise, specialized vocabulary appropriately in content-area writing. Students develop their writing craft, with an emphasis on pacing and style. They experiment with sentence length, complex sentence structures, and varied leads and endings. Students can summarize and synthesize key works for their compositions.

This course helps students broaden and deepen their understanding of informational and literary texts through comparison and contrast. Students reflect on their skills and adjust their comprehension and vocabulary strategies to become better readers. They use textual evidence and quote accurately to support their analyses and interpretations. Using evidence from multiple texts, students discuss, reflect on, and respond to a wide variety of literary genres and informational texts. Students read for pleasure, choosing books based on personal preference, topic, genre, theme, or author.

MATH 5: This course helps students: (1) develop fluency with adding and subtracting fractions and build understanding of multiplying and dividing fractions in limited cases (unit fractions divided by whole numbers and whole numbers divided by unit fractions); (2) extend division to two-digit divisors, integrate decimal fractions into the place value system, develop understanding of operations with decimals to hundredths, and build fluency with whole-number and decimal operations; and (3) develop understanding of volume.

SCIENCE 5: This course provides students with a solid, balanced foundation in the scientific concepts, with an emphasis on life science, physical science, earth science, environmental science, and the nature of science. Students will complete hands-on experiments using the scientific process, with an emphasis on variables, motion, design, and ecosystems.

SOCIAL STUDIES 5: This course is designed to teach students about the world they live in by exploring the Five Themes of Geography. These include location, place, region, human-environment interaction, and movement. Students will develop and extend their knowledge of basic mapping skills.

Advisory 5: The advisory class provides students with a range of social-emotional learning opportunities through our Second Step and PBIS programs. Students receive developmentally appropriate lessons to enhance their peer relationships and self-esteem, along with academic support.

MTSS: The MTSS Framework provides a continuum of academic support and services during the intervention period, with a focus on improving math and reading outcomes. Students work in small groups to receive intensive intervention and regular progress monitoring of their learning. Teachers analyze student progress data in teams and adjust student interventions weekly to ensure the most appropriate level of support for each student.

RELATED ARTS CLASSES:

Highlands Middle School follows the PA Code for required related arts classes. Students may choose related arts classes once the required classes are selected.

BAND 5:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Band is a year-long course. Students who enroll in both Band and Chorus will split rehearsal time between the two ensembles if their scheduled class times conflict.

CHORUS 5:

Students will develop individual and ensemble singing skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Chorus is a year-long course. Students who enroll in both Band and Chorus will split rehearsal time between the two ensembles if their scheduled class times conflict.

ART 5:

This course offers students comprehensive art experiences through detailed explorations of the classics, including painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, graphic design, and crafts. In addition to gaining confidence and proficiency with a variety of media, students will learn about the history, analysis, and interpretation of art. A strong focus on processes will be applied.

COMPUTER SKILLS 5:

This course is an introduction to computers, with a focus on typing skills and the Google Workspace, primarily Google Docs and Google Slides. Digital Citizenship is also covered in this class. Students will also learn the basics of Block Coding and create simple projects using Microbits. This class will incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) concepts.

MUSIC 5:

Students will practice and improve their musical skills and understanding through classroom performance, critical analysis, and examination of historical and cultural contexts. Students will sing a variety of songs, play classroom instruments, create musical works, and listen to and respond to various musical styles.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION 5:

This course provides a basic understanding of team sports concepts, lifetime activities, gross and fine locomotor skills, and manipulative skill development through participation in the following activities: fitness/flag football, basketball, volleyball, wiffleball, tchoukball, and fleeing/dodging games. Lifetime Activities: walking/jogging, disc golf, bowling, bocce ball, fitness scavenger hunts, and orienteering.

LIFETIME WELLNESS 5:

This course provides students with foundational knowledge of Wellness by covering the 7 types of Health: Physical, Mental, Emotional, Social, Spiritual, Environmental, and Occupational. Wellness classes are designed to teach students healthy living habits, decision-making strategies, body systems, and to describe and review growth and development.

TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION 5:

This course enables students to explore technological systems firsthand through a variety of experiences. Students will use various materials to design solutions to problems presented to them and will work through structural design and transportation systems. This class will incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) concepts and utilize CAD functions.

FAMILY CONSUMER SCIENCE 5:

This course's overarching theme is goal setting. In grade 5, students will learn about SMART goals and the importance of developing routines and schedules to achieve them. Students will also learn the steps of the decision-making process and how to apply it to build healthy relationships, foster effective communication, and strengthen teamwork within families and communities. Students will identify their roles within their family and community. They will develop leadership skills and recognize their personal strengths to improve family dynamics. Students will also be introduced to different types of families and how culture can affect how families function. Finally, career awareness will be introduced, and students will understand how different careers can impact their family dynamics. Through hands-on activities and discussions, students will develop essential life skills for personal and social success.

INTRODUCTION TO WORLD LANGUAGE:

This foundational exploratory course supports the mission and goals of Highlands Middle School by fostering academic growth, cultural awareness, and personal development. Through engaging, age-appropriate activities, students are introduced to basic communication skills, cultural practices, and global perspectives that promote respect for diversity and a positive self-identity.

This course emphasizes the development of essential listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills at an introductory level, while also encouraging independent learning, responsible decision-making, and effective communication. Students learn strategies for managing everyday challenges, collaborating with peers, and expressing ideas respectfully in a supportive learning environment.

Consistent with the middle school's commitment to shared responsibility for literacy and skill development, this course integrates reading, writing, and critical thinking across activities. Students also explore how world languages connect to real-world applications, career awareness, and global citizenship, supporting their transition toward greater independence and self-direction as learners.

Grade Six Course Listing

<u>COURSES</u>	<u>PERIODS</u>	<u>WEEKS</u>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 6	5	36
MATHEMATICS 6	5	36
SCIENCE 6	5	36
SOCIAL STUDIES	5	36
SPECIAL AREA CLASSES:	5	18/36

Grade Six Course Descriptions

6TH GRADE REQUIRED COURSES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ART 6: This course increasingly challenges students to sharpen their ability to write and speak with greater clarity and coherence, providing clear reasons and relevant evidence. They examine how authors use reasons to make their points and support arguments with evidence, distinguishing unsupported ideas from those backed by evidence. They know how to answer questions through writing and can use rewriting opportunities to refine their understanding of a text or topic. They also take a critical stance toward sources and apply criteria to identify reliable information rather than mere conjecture.

This course helps students read grade-appropriate, complex literature and informational text and cite textual evidence to support analyses. Students analyze the structure and content of complex, grade-appropriate texts, determining how sentences and paragraphs within texts influence and contribute to the plot's development and the elaboration of events or ideas. Students share their findings in class discussions, practicing how to sequence ideas logically and highlight the themes and key details they find most persuasive. Students' vocabularies expand as they become more attuned to using context, knowledge of Greek and Latin roots and affixes, and word analysis to determine the meaning of academic words.

MATH 6: This course focuses on four critical areas: (1) connecting ratio and rate to whole-number multiplication and division and using these concepts to solve problems; (2) deepening understanding of division of fractions and extending the notion of number to the system of

rational numbers, which includes negative numbers; (3) writing, interpreting, and using expressions and equations; and (4) developing statistical thinking.

SCIENCE 6: This course provides students with a solid, well-balanced foundation in scientific concepts across four major areas: life science, physical science, earth science, environmental science, and the nature of science. Students will engage in hands-on activities that apply the scientific process, with modules covering matter, weather and the atmosphere, basic chemistry, energy transfer, cellular structure, reproduction, and growth.

SOCIAL STUDIES 6: This course engages students in investigating the Five Themes of Geography, beginning with prehistory and extending through the fall of the Roman Empire. After this focused geography study, students will apply the information as they are introduced to the rise of ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. In addition to the newly acquired geography skills, students will investigate the economics, sociology, politics, and history of these regions, their cultures, and their contributions to modern societies.

Advisory 6:

The Advisory class provides students with a range of social-emotional learning opportunities through our Mindhacks partnership and PBIS program. Students receive developmentally appropriate lessons to enhance their peer relationships and self-esteem, along with academic support.

MTSS:

The MTSS Framework provides a continuum of academic support and services during the intervention period, with a focus on improving math and reading outcomes. Students work in small groups to receive intensive intervention and regular progress monitoring of their learning. Teachers analyze student progress data in teams and adjust student interventions weekly to ensure the most appropriate level of support for each student.

RELATED ARTS CLASSES:

Highlands Middle School follows the PA Code for required related arts classes. Students may choose related arts classes once the required classes are selected.

BAND 6:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Band is a year-long course. Students who enroll in both

Band and Chorus will split rehearsal time between the two ensembles if their scheduled class times conflict.

CHORUS 6:

Students will develop individual and ensemble singing skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Chorus is a year-long course. Students who enroll in both Band and Chorus will split rehearsal time between the two ensembles if their scheduled class times conflict.

ART 6:

This course offers students comprehensive art experiences through detailed explorations of the classics, including painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, graphic design, and crafts. In addition to gaining confidence and proficiency with a variety of media, students will learn about the history, analysis, and interpretation of art.

MUSIC 6:

Students will practice and improve their musical skills and understanding through classroom performance, critical analysis, and examination of historical and cultural contexts. Students will sing a variety of songs, play classroom instruments, create musical works, and listen to and respond to various musical styles.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION 6:

This course builds on the 5th-grade foundation in team sports concepts, lifelong activities, gross and fine locomotor skills, and manipulative skill development. Students will also focus on more rigorous bodyweight resistance training, game-play strategies, and advanced applications of manipulative and locomotor skills. Activities: fitness/flag football, basketball, volleyball, wiffleball, tchoukball, fleeing/dodging games, tennis, bodyweight fitness, Fitnessgram assessment.

LIFETIME WELLNESS 6:

This course provides students with foundational knowledge of Wellness by covering the 7 types of Health: Physical, Mental, Emotional, Social, Spiritual, Environmental, and Occupational. Wellness classes are designed to teach students healthy living habits, decision-making strategies, review body systems, and learn how physical activity affects them, and describe and review growth and development. Students will also learn what healthy relationships are and how they apply to their individual lives.

TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEMS 6:

This course helps students explore manufacturing and transportation systems firsthand through a variety of experiences. Students will use manufacturing and scientific information to solve problems presented to them. Students will apply scientific theories to develop transportation systems through open-ended projects, strengthening technological problem-solving skills. This class will incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) concepts.

APP CREATORS: Project Lead the Way Course

~~(taking the place of Computer Science 6 & Innovations 6)~~

~~This course helps students see how mobile apps are made. Students incorporate creativity, critical thinking and innovation as they design and develop mobile app solutions to exciting, real-world problems! This course uses a curriculum developed by Project Lead the Way, incorporating the PA state science and Next Generation Science Standards.~~

Stem 6

This course is a high-energy, 9-week introduction to modern engineering and digital creation. This course is designed to turn students from consumers of technology into creators of technology. Students will begin by exploring software logic through App Development and Block Coding, learning to solve problems with code. They will then transition into the physical world by mastering Basic Electrical Theory. Using TinkerCAD, students will virtually simulate complex circuits before bringing them to life with Physical Breadboards, LEDs, and Jumper Wires. The course concludes with a deep dive into Automation and Robotics Careers, where students research how these skills are transforming the global workforce. This class will incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) concepts.

FAMILY CONSUMER SCIENCE 6:

The grade 6 curriculum focuses on food science, nutrition, and career exploration in the culinary and hospitality fields. Students will be introduced to kitchen safety and sanitation procedures to align with a career in culinary arts. Nutrition lessons will focus on creating balanced meals using the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate, with labs and demonstrations that emphasize each of the 5 food groups. Students will be encouraged to incorporate SMART goals to improve overall nutrition and personal well-being. Students will be introduced to basic culinary skills and techniques for cooking from scratch. They will be encouraged to think critically about making healthy food choices, to eat in moderation, to try new foods, and to eat a varied, nutritionally balanced diet. Engaging lessons also introduce consumer awareness and financial responsibility, ensuring students understand smart shopping, budgeting, and saving strategies. These topics equip students with practical life skills and encourage responsible decision-making.

EXPLORATORY SPANISH

This foundational course supports the mission of promoting academic growth, cultural awareness, and personal development. Through engaging, developmentally appropriate activities, students are introduced to the Spanish language and the cultures of Spanish-speaking communities, fostering respect for differences and a positive self-image.

This course focuses on introductory communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and encourages independent learning, responsible decision-making, and open communication. Students practice basic language structures and vocabulary in meaningful contexts that foster collaboration, self-confidence, and the ability to cope with everyday challenges in a supportive classroom environment.

Consistent with the middle school's emphasis on shared responsibility for literacy and essential skills, Exploratory Spanish integrates reading, writing, and critical thinking across all activities. Students also explore real-world connections between Spanish and career pathways, global citizenship, and community engagement, supporting their gradual transition from dependent learners to increasingly self-directed adolescents.

Grade Seven Course Listing

<u>REQUIRED COURSES</u>	<u>PERIODS</u>	<u>WEEKS</u>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 7	5	36
MATHEMATICS 7	5	36
PRE-ALGEBRA (requires teacher recommendation)	5	36
SCIENCE 7	5	36
WORLD CULTURES	5	36
RELATED ARTS CLASSES:	5	18/36

Grade Seven Course Descriptions

7TH GRADE REQUIRED COURSES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 7: This course helps students trace how an argument develops within a text and assess the validity of the evidence. They make their reasoning clear to listeners and readers and constructively evaluate others' use of evidence, offering several sources to support their own claims. Their vocabulary has developed to the point where they distinguish between denotative and connotative meaning and analyze how specific word choice affects tone. As developing writers, they cite several sources of specific, relevant evidence to support their point of view on texts and topics. Their writing is more structured, with clear introductions and conclusions and effective transitions that create cohesion and clarify relationships among ideas. In their writing, they acknowledge the other side of a debate or an alternative perspective while avoiding any trace of plagiarism.

This course helps students demonstrate their ability to read challenging, complex texts closely and cite multiple specific examples to support their claims. They can recognize the interplay among setting, plot, and characters and provide an objective summary of a text, separate from their own reaction. They are adept at stepping back to compare different interpretations of a topic, identifying how authors shape their presentation of key information and choose to highlight certain facts over others.

MATHEMATICS 7: This course focuses on four critical areas: (1) developing understanding of and applying proportional relationships; (2) developing understanding of operations with rational numbers and working with expressions and linear equations; (3) solving problems involving scale drawings and informal geometric constructions, and working with two- and three-dimensional

shapes to solve problems involving area, surface area, and volume; and (4) drawing inferences about populations from samples.

PRE-ALGEBRA: (Teacher recommendation only) This course emphasizes the concepts needed for success in algebra. It introduces integers, fractions, and equations, and explains how to solve equations with variables. It also reviews arithmetic algorithms. Students learn methods for analyzing and applying functions and move between multiple representations of functions, including linear, exponential, and quadratic.

SCIENCE 7: This course continues to provide a well-balanced foundation in scientific concepts across four major areas: life science, physical science, earth science, environmental science, and the nature of science. Students will engage in hands-on activities that apply scientific processes and information technology, with a focus on earth and space science, geology, biology, and ecological systems.

WORLD CULTURES: This course examines countries and peoples worldwide, with an emphasis on early African, Chinese, Japanese, and European nations from the beginning of the A.D. era through the Middle Ages. It also extends the Five Themes of Geography into world geography. The disciplines of geography, economics, sociology, and government are examined to emphasize historical themes and the underlying concepts that unify historical events. The class will focus on reading, writing, and map skills.

Advisory 7:

The Advisory class provides students with a range of social-emotional learning opportunities through our Second Step and PBIS programs. Students receive developmentally appropriate lessons to enhance their peer relationships and self-esteem, along with academic support.

MTSS:

The MTSS Framework provides a continuum of academic support and services during the intervention period, with a focus on improving math and reading outcomes. Students work in small groups to receive intensive intervention and regular progress monitoring of their learning. Teachers analyze student progress data in teams and adjust student interventions weekly to ensure the most appropriate level of support for each student.

RELATED ARTS CLASSES:

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BAND 7:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Band is a year-long course that meets on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the designated specials period. Students who are enrolled in both band and chorus will attend chorus on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday during advisory time. Students who are not enrolled in chorus will meet with their respective ensembles during advisory on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.

CHORUS 7:

Students will develop individual and ensemble singing skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Chorus is a year-long course that meets on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the designated specials period. Students who are enrolled in both band and chorus will attend chorus during advisory time on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Students who are not enrolled in band will also meet during advisory on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

ART 7:

This course offers students comprehensive art experiences through detailed explorations of the classics, including painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, graphic design, and crafts. In addition to gaining confidence and proficiency with a variety of media, students will learn about the history, analysis, and interpretation of art.

Painting and Drawing 1:

This course introduces a wide variety of media and techniques. This course covers design and composition, including painting, drawing, cartooning, and sketchbook work. Students will be encouraged to work creatively and to become proficient with a range of materials and basic processes.

CERAMICS 1:

This course is designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore methods of artistic expression through studies in pottery and three-dimensional art making. The study will include a four-week concentration in pottery, with experiences on the pottery wheel, hand-building, and glazing. The other half of the 9 weeks is devoted to creating sculptures while exploring a variety of media, including clay, plaster, metal, wood, glass, and plastic. Within each unit of study, various artists and artistic styles will be covered, along with different sculptural techniques and

surface treatments. These techniques will include under- and over-glazing, marbleizing clay, and traditional patina finishes.

COMPUTER Skills 7:

~~This course helps students build on the concepts they learned in Computer Skills 6 using Google Slides and Google Docs. Students will use their acquired skills to create real world projects that use technology as well as critical thinking skills. Students will continue to complete a daily typing drill to increase their typing speeds. Computer programming will be introduced in this class. This class will incorporate Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) concepts.~~

STEM 7

This course is a high-intensity, hands-on introduction to modern engineering that moves students beyond basic kits and into professional design and fabrication. Integrating Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) concepts, the course rotates through three core industry pillars. Students begin with 3D Virtual Design, mastering Autodesk Inventor to transform 2D sketches into parametric 3D models and using slicing software to bring their designs to life through 3D printing. The journey continues into Hardware Engineering, where students apply electrical theory to bridge the gap between software and hardware, moving from breadboard prototypes to permanent, soldered circuits. Finally, students enter the "lab of the future," using VEX Robotics and Collaborative Robots (Cobots) to solve real-world automation challenges through a human-machine partnership.

MUSIC 7:

Students will practice and improve their music skills and understanding through critical analysis, examination of historical and cultural contexts, guided research, and project-based learning. Students will explore various musical styles, view and analyze performances, and complete relevant research and composition projects.

POP MUSIC ICONS:

Students will explore significant genres, musicians, and technological advancements that have shaped popular music throughout history. Students will listen to and analyze diverse musical styles, examine historical and cultural contexts, and complete relevant research and composition projects.

BROADWAY MUSICALS 7:

Students will learn the elements, history, and performance techniques of musicals through classroom practice and performance, viewing and analyzing selected musicals, and relevant research and design projects. Students will sing selected songs, practice script reading, plan blocking and choreography, and explore specific aspects of musical productions through project-based learning.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS 7:

This course covers human growth and development, controllable and uncontrollable risk factors, weight management, components of fitness, communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health, bullying prevention, and drug awareness.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION 7:

This course helps students build on and deepen their sixth-grade skills. Lifetime activities will continue to emphasize a sound level of fitness, providing a healthy outlet for stress. Activities: fitness/flag football, basketball, volleyball, wiffleball, tchoukball, fleeing/dodging games, tennis, bodyweight fitness, resistance band training, fitnessgram assessment.

NOTE: Students must follow the approved gym clothing guidelines outlined in the student syllabus.

RESISTANCE TRAINING 7

This course is designed to introduce students to the health benefits, techniques, training principles, safety procedures, and etiquette of resistance training. Students will learn to identify the specific muscle groups targeted by each exercise, demonstrate proper technique across all resistance training exercises, identify and apply training principles (FITT, Progression, Specificity) when designing an individualized plan, and promote resistance training as a lifelong fitness activity in their own lives.

MANUFACTURING 7:

This course enables students to explore manufacturing processes and techniques while developing hands-on skills used in our manufacturing industry. Students will be presented with design problems and will develop solutions or products using the provided equipment. This course will introduce various tooling and finishing techniques related to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCE 7:

This course has students use SMART goals to focus on personal finance, consumer skills, and resource management, preparing them for financial independence and smart decision-making. An emphasis will be placed on distinguishing between careers and jobs, and on how setting goals and making sound decisions about future career prospects will help position students for financial security. Students will explore consumer rights, how to use resources to make informed choices, and how products are marketed to specific consumer groups. Students will understand how to differentiate between wants and needs, how to use resources, and the decision-making

process for making wise choices to maximize personal and family resources. This curriculum helps students build financial confidence and develop essential skills for personal and future success.

EXPLORATORY GERMAN:

This introductory course emphasizes cultural learning by introducing students to traditions, customs, daily life, and perspectives from German-speaking countries, fostering respect for diversity and global awareness.

In addition to cultural exploration, students develop foundational language skills by studying basic German grammar and essential vocabulary. Instruction focuses on listening, speaking, reading, and writing at an introductory level, emphasizing effective communication, collaboration, and independent learning. Students engage in structured practice that builds confidence and supports positive decision-making and self-expression.

Consistent with the middle school's commitment to shared responsibility for literacy and skill development, Exploratory German integrates reading, writing, and critical thinking across activities. The course also highlights real-world and career connections to language learning, supporting students as they become increasingly self-directed learners and responsible global citizens.

JAZZ BAND 7-8:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Jazz Band students must also be enrolled in Band Class.

Grade Eight Course Listing

<u>REQUIRED COURSES</u>	<u>PERIODS</u>	<u>WEEKS</u>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 8	5	36
PRE-ALGEBRA	5	36
ALGEBRA 1 (Requires teacher recommendation)	5	36
SCIENCE 8	5	36
U.S. HISTORY	5	36
RELATED ARTS:	5	18/36

Grade Eight Course Descriptions

8TH GRADE REQUIRED COURSES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS 8: This course helps students develop a strong vocabulary of academic words and learn to use them to speak and write with greater precision. Their writing continues to grow, focusing on organizing ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; selecting relevant facts; and using varied transitions to clarify or show relationships among elements.

This course helps students grapple with high-quality, complex nonfiction texts and great works of literature. The focus shifts from narrative to expository in informational texts. Students cite textual evidence to support an analysis or critique, question an author's assumptions, and assess the accuracy of claims. In grade 8, students read closely and identify evidence to use in their own writing; they analyze two or more texts that present conflicting information on the same topic and determine whether the disagreement concerns facts or interpretation. They analyze how point of view can be manipulated to create specific effects, such as dramatic irony, and investigate how particular passages within a text connect to advance the plot, reveal a character, or highlight an idea.

PRE-ALGEBRA: This course emphasizes the concepts needed for success in algebra. It introduces integers, fractions, and equations, and explains how to solve equations with variables. It also reviews arithmetic algorithms. Students learn methods for analyzing and applying functions and move between multiple representations of functions, including linear, exponential, and quadratic.

ALGEBRA I: (Teacher recommendation only) This course helps students formalize and extend algebraic concepts established in prior coursework. Students will deepen and extend their understanding of linear and exponential relationships by comparing them and applying linear models to data that exhibit a linear trend. Students will use methods to analyze and apply functions. Students will fluently move among multiple representations of functions, including linear, exponential, and quadratic.

SCIENCE 8: This course helps students use the scientific method, aided by information technology and hands-on activities, to solve problems as they learn about the diversity of life, human activity, the changing Earth, chemistry, motion, energy, and machines.

U.S. HISTORY: This course provides an overview of history, with an emphasis on the Colonial Period to 1890, the Civil War, and America's role in the Industrial Revolution and its attendant social problems. Minority issues and current affairs are also included in the program. The course draws on the disciplines of geography, economics, sociology, and political science to emphasize historical themes and the underlying concepts that unify historical events. It is organized chronologically to help students develop a sense of time and continuity.

MTSS:

The MTSS Framework provides a continuum of academic support and services during the intervention period, with a focus on improving math and reading outcomes. Students work in small groups to receive intensive intervention and regular progress monitoring of their learning. Teachers analyze student progress data in teams and adjust student interventions weekly to ensure the most appropriate level of support for each student.

Advisory 8:

The Advisory class provides students with a range of social-emotional learning opportunities through our Second Step and PBIS programs. Students receive developmentally appropriate lessons to enhance their peer relationships and self-esteem, along with academic support.

RELATED ARTS CLASSES:

Highlands Middle School follows the PA Code for required related arts classes. Students may choose related arts classes once the required classes are selected.

BAND 8:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances

after school or during the school day. Band is a year-long course that meets on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the designated specials period. Students enrolled in both band and chorus will attend chorus during advisory time on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Students not enrolled in chorus will meet with their respective ensembles during advisory on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday.

JAZZ BAND 7-8:

Students will develop individual and ensemble instrumental performance skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. All students enrolled in Jazz Band must also be enrolled in Band.

CHORUS 8:

Students will develop individual and ensemble singing skills and musicianship by preparing music for public performances. Attendance at evening concerts is required, and students may occasionally be required to participate in additional rehearsals or performances after school or during the school day. Chorus is a year-long course that meets on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during the designated specials period. Students who are enrolled in both band and chorus will attend chorus during advisory time on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Students who are not enrolled in band will also meet during advisory on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

ART 8:

This course offers students comprehensive art experiences through detailed explorations of the classics, including painting, drawing, printmaking, sculpture, graphic design, and crafts. In addition to gaining confidence and proficiency with a variety of media, students will learn about the history, analysis, and interpretation of art. The focus will begin to shift toward the product in preparation for advanced high school courses.

CERAMICS 2

This course is designed for students seeking a more in-depth clay experience. Emphasis will be placed on refining basic skills to produce more complex and mature work. A variety of glazing and decorating techniques will be explored. In addition, the study of ceramic history will focus on contemporary artists.

PAINTING AND DRAWING 2

This course builds on the basics of using a wide variety of media and techniques taught in Painting and Drawing 1. It covers advanced topics in design and composition, including painting, drawing,

cartooning, and sketchbook work. Students will be encouraged to work creatively and to become proficient with a range of materials and basic processes.

MUSIC 8:

Students will practice and improve their music skills and understanding through critical analysis, examination of historical and cultural contexts, guided research, and project-based learning. Students will explore various musical styles, view and analyze performances, and complete relevant research and composition projects.

MUSIC IN MOVIES AND THE MEDIA:

Students will explore the role of music in movies, television, and other historical and contemporary media. Students will learn about significant composers and musical works, view and analyze excerpts from relevant media, perform selected songs, and create their own works for specific media projects.

BROADWAY MUSICALS 8:

Students will learn the elements, history, and performance techniques of musicals through classroom practice and performance, viewing and analyzing selected musicals, and relevant research and design projects. Students will sing selected songs, practice script reading, plan blocking and choreography, and explore specific aspects of musical productions through project-based learning.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS 8:

This course emphasizes health concerns during a student's early adolescent years. Topics include growth, heredity, weight management, nutritional basics, body systems, and reproductive awareness.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION 8:

This course builds on the basic elements of team sports and individual fitness from Grade 7 and may include archery, golf, bowling, and martial arts. It will also build on Grade 7 resistance-training concepts by incorporating free-weight and machine-based resistance training. Students will apply the FITT training principle to design personalized fitness programs that promote lifelong wellness.

NOTE: Students must follow the approved gym clothing guidelines outlined in the Student Syllabus.

ADVANCED RESISTANCE TRAINING

This course is designed to build a foundation in resistance-training terminology, exercise principles, and techniques to improve all 5 components of Physical Fitness in Grade 7. In 8th Grade, the course will build on the knowledge acquired in 7th Grade to further develop all components of physical fitness by incorporating new training principles, performing advanced exercises, and developing personal resistance-training plans.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT 8:

This course is designed as a capstone and incorporates previously learned concepts in manufacturing systems. Students will be introduced to advanced manufacturing and CAD software to design and develop a product. Students will work through the entire production process, beginning with inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback, and calculate the cost of production, including labor.

AUTOMATION & ROBOTICS: Project Lead the Way Course

This course lays a foundation for students to work with automation and robotics as they explore the history, development, and influence of these technologies. As students learn about mechanical systems, machine automation, and computer control systems, they will design and program solutions to real-world problems. This course uses a curriculum developed by Project Lead the Way and aligned with the PA state science standards and the Next Generation Science Standards.

FAMILY CONSUMER SCIENCE 8:

This course introduces students to education, early childhood development, and resource management, providing insight into careers in childcare, education, and human services. They explore the stages of child development, learning strategies, developmental milestones, child development theories and theorists, and the impact of positive interactions on young learners. Hands-on experiences and discussions help students understand the responsibilities of caregivers and educators. Goal setting and decision-making will remain a focus as students prepare developmentally appropriate environments for teaching kindergarten- and preschool-aged students. This curriculum prepares students with the skills and knowledge needed for responsible decision-making and future career exploration.

INTRODUCTION TO SPANISH:

This course emphasizes structured grammar instruction and reinforces communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Students engage in more in-depth study of Spanish language structures, including sentence formation, verb usage, and agreement, to build accuracy and confidence. Alongside language development, this course integrates geography, history, and cultural exploration of Spanish-speaking countries, helping students understand how language connects to people, places, and global perspectives.

Consistent with the school's commitment to academic growth and shared responsibility for literacy, this course promotes critical thinking, independent study habits, and responsible decision-making. Through culturally responsive instruction and real-world connections, students develop the skills, confidence, and global awareness needed to transition successfully into high school Spanish and become informed, respectful global citizens.

INTRODUCTION TO GERMAN:

This course emphasizes structured grammar instruction and reinforces communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students engage in an in-depth study of foundational German language structures, including sentence structure, verb usage, and grammatical agreement, to build accuracy and confidence.

In addition to language development, this course integrates geography, history, and cultural exploration of German-speaking countries, helping students understand how language reflects culture, traditions, and global perspectives. Aligned with the school's commitment to academic growth and shared responsibility for literacy, this course promotes critical thinking, independent learning, and responsible decision-making.

Through culturally responsive instruction and real-world connections, students develop the linguistic skills, confidence, and global awareness needed to transition successfully into high school German and become informed, respectful global citizens.

NOTICE: The Highlands School District does not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex, or handicap in the enrollment and admission of students, the recruitment and employment of professional and classified staff, and the operation of any of its programs and activities, as specified by federal laws and regulations. Inquiries may be directed to the Title IX and Section 504 coordinators, who can be reached at the Administrative Center, 724-226-2400.