

**Fort Couch
Middle School**



**2026- 2027
Student/Family Handbook**

FORT COUCH MIDDLE SCHOOL

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

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Mr. Gordon Mathews, Assistant Principal
Mr. Richard Baur, School Counselor (Grade 8)
Ms. Jessica Alls, School Counselor (Grade 7)
Mrs. Sharon Lacey, Head Secretary
Ms. Jill Polfus, Attendance Secretary
Ms. Annette Petrarca, School Nurse
Officer Tom White, School Police
Mr. Anthony Krause, Head Custodian

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Mr. Raymond Berrott, Director of Technology
Mr. Scott Burchill, Director of Business & Finance
Mr. Danny Holzer, Director of Athletics
Mr. Bradley Wilson, Director of Strategic Initiatives
Mr. Jonn Mansfield, Director of Transportation
Mr. Dan Snyder, Director of Operations and Facilities
Mrs. Tina Vojtko, Communications Specialist
Ms. Lauren Folino, Food Service Director
Mr. Sean Bryson, Chief of School Police

Upper St. Clair School District Board of School Directors

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Mrs. Hallie Snyder, Vice President
Dr. Danielle Wetzel
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Mrs. Barbara L. Bolas
Mrs. Kelly Hanna
Mr. Justin Lamber
Mrs. Angela B. Petersen
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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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PRINCIPALS' WELCOME LETTER

August 2026

Dear Fort Couch Students and Families,

Welcome to the 2026-2027 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.

Fort Couch strives 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,

Dr. Dan Beck, Principal

Mr. 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 align with the core values of our district in the following ways:

UNITY

Focuses on social connection, mutual support, community, and sharing with others.

- **Develop socially** by modeling accepted social attitudes and social skills.
- **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.
- **Express yourself creatively** by sharing your talents and abilities in the Arts.

SUCCESS

Focuses on intellectual growth, academic achievement, and active participation.

- **Grow intellectually** by exposing yourself to ideas and concepts that challenge your ability to think, reason and make decisions.
- **Seek help when you need it** in order to gain a better understanding of your schoolwork.
- **Grow physically** by being an active participant in curricular and extracurricular activities that develop your body and sense of fair play.

CHARACTER

Focuses on self-awareness, personal maturity, authenticity, and inner growth.

- **Be yourself** because you are a special person.
- **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.

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.

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 daily course offering prepares students for the transition to high school. Students receive instruction in a variety of curriculum areas, providing 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. Educational research shows that a child will more readily understand, learn, and remember what they are taught when the curriculum is meaningful and deeply explored, rather than just memorized for a quick quiz. By placing lessons in a real-world context and rooting new ideas directly in our students' unique cultures, backgrounds, and personal experiences, we make learning click faster and stick with them for the long haul.

The curriculum allows teachers to educate by repeating, reinforcing and extending similar objectives at each grade level. For example, 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 (MYP)

The Middle Years Program (MYP) is an exciting international program designed for students aged 10 to 16. While MYP students learn the exact same Upper St. Clair curriculum as everyone else, the way they learn is a little different. It is designed to challenge your thinking and build real-world life skills. Key Features of the Program include:

- Connected Thinking: Instead of looking at subjects in isolation, lessons emphasize how everything connects. You will explore how science, history, math, and art all relate to one another.
- The 5 Big Themes: Every unit you study is built around one of five real-world areas:
 - *Human Ingenuity* (how we create and invent)
 - *Environments* (how we interact with the world around us)
 - *Community and Service* (how we help others)
 - *Approaches to Learning* (how to become a better student)
 - *Health and Social Education* (how we look after ourselves and our communities)
- Global & Local Awareness: You will explore different cultures and global perspectives, while also gaining a deeper understanding of your own history and traditions.
- Language Power: The program places a huge emphasis on communication, requiring students to focus on mastering both their native language and a second language.
- Community Service: Students learn good citizenship firsthand by participating in required community service projects.

The IB Program is open to all students! There are no test scores or special entrance requirements needed to join—it is simply subject to available space and scheduling. 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 begins at 8:55 A.M. and ends at 3:35 P.M.
- Students should not be in the building before 8:30 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.
- Students will not be able to enter the building prior to 8:30. This is also when the cafeteria opens for students.
- 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.

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.

ACADEMICS

MIDDLE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

The Association for Middle Level Education sets the foundation for our work: A successful learning environment for young adolescents is complex and deeply interconnected. Student academic success relies heavily on a balance of physical, intellectual, moral, psychological, and social-emotional growth. While flexible structures and a shared vision provide a strong foundation, middle school students truly thrive when challenged by a rigorous curriculum, varied learning approaches, and comprehensive health and wellness programs. Without these core elements, a school cannot operate at its highest capacity or fully realize its tremendous potential.

CANVAS AND FOCUS

A goal of Fort Couch Middle School is to allow parents to access progress and attendance information on a timely basis. We believe that by providing parents with up-to-date academic and attendance information, we will enhance the communication between the school and parents.

CHEATING/PLAGIARISM

At our school, we expect every student to submit work that is entirely their own. Many people think "copying" or "borrowing" someone's work isn't a big deal, but it is actually a form of dishonesty—it is taking credit for someone else's hard work.

To keep things fair for everyone, here is exactly what is **not allowed** on any homework, project, paper, or test:

- **Taking Credit:** Turning in someone else's work and putting your name on it.
- **Copy-Pasting:** Using words or ideas from a website, book, or friend without clearly stating where you got them (giving credit).
- **Improper Quotes:** Forgetting to use quotation marks "" around words you didn't write, or giving the wrong information about where a quote came from.
- **Rewriting Slightly:** Just changing a few words but keeping the exact same sentence structure from a source without giving credit.
- **The "Over-Copy":** Copying so many words or ideas from a source that it makes up the majority of your assignment—even if you mention where you got it from. Your work needs to be *your* work.
- **Using AI Incorrectly:** Using Artificial Intelligence (like ChatGPT) to write or fix your work and pretending you wrote it yourself, or using it without permission and proper credit.
- **Sharing Answers:** Giving or receiving test/homework questions and answers—whether that's in person, via text, on social media, or through any other app.

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 may need additional support with a concept.

CONTENT SPECIFIC INFORMATION

The following section provides a brief overview of the core content and related course areas students experience at Fort Couch. These descriptions are intended to give families a general understanding of each subject area. Additional grade level course descriptions, unit details, and rotation information can be found in **Appendix B: Additional Course Information**.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The English Language Arts program at Fort Couch helps students develop as readers, writers, speakers, listeners, and thinkers. Students build vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing skills, grammar usage, oral communication, and an appreciation for literature and informational text.

Instruction includes fiction and nonfiction reading, process writing, language structure, speaking, and listening. Teachers use a variety of texts and activities to support students at different readiness levels and help them communicate effectively.

MATH

The Fort Couch math program is designed to help students build strong mathematical understanding, problem solving skills, and confidence. The curriculum emphasizes conceptual development, independent thinking, real life application, and the use of technology.

Students are supported through pretesting, enrichment, remediation, Panther Time, Period 8 support, and MAP data. Most students remain on a pathway that allows for the possibility of taking calculus by senior year in high school.

SCIENCE

The Fort Couch science program helps students experience science through inquiry, labs, hands on activities, science tools, and real world connections. Students learn scientific concepts while also developing the skills and processes needed for scientific thought and investigation.

STEAM connections are an important part of the science curriculum. Students may make reports, give oral presentations, explore global issues, apply mathematical reasoning, and connect science to other content areas.

SOCIAL STUDIES

The Social Studies curriculum integrates geography, economics, civics, and history. Students engage with important historical events, civic ideas, economic concepts, and geographic understandings through problem solving, analytical reasoning, writing, and discussion.

Many Social Studies activities connect with other curriculum areas and help students better understand the world, their community, and their role as informed citizens.

WORLD LANGUAGE

The middle school World Language program begins with an exploratory program in 5th Grade. 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.

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.

SUPPORTING ALL STUDENTS

ATHLETIC PROGRAM

Fall Sports (September – October): 7th and 8th Grade Cheer, 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, and 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), and Intramural Girls Basketball

Spring (April - May): 7th and 8th Grade Boys & Girls Track and Field, 7th and 8th Grade Girls 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.

FORT FAMILY PROGRAM

Fort Family is implementing a comprehensive, school-wide program to prevent and reduce bullying. The initiative focuses on three core objectives: addressing current bullying issues, preventing future incidents, and fostering healthier student-peer relationships.

PANTHER TIME / PERIOD 8

Panther Time and Period 8 are times built into the student day to provide students with remediation and enrichment opportunities as well as time for team activities. Students will utilize FLEX for attendance purposes for both of these periods.

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.

SCHOOL COUNSELING SERVICES

School 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 school counselor is to advocate for students and to serve as the liaison between students, teachers, parents and administration. The school 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. The School Counselors for the 2026-2027 School Year are as follows:

Jessica Alls, 7th grade, Class of 2032 jrobinson@uscscd.k12.pa.us

Richard Baur, 8th grade, Class of 2031 rbaur@uscscd.k12.pa.us

SOCIALS

The PTSO sponsors school socials throughout the year. Check the website for the dates. Socials are from 6:30 PM to 8:30 P.M. Students must stay at the social until dismissal at 8:30 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 MAP, 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.

WORK PERMITS

Students under the age of 18 must obtain a work permit to engage in after-school, summer, or work-study employment. Detailed application procedures and permit requirements are available through the School Counseling Department or online at <https://ftcouch.uscsd.k12.pa.us/information/work-permits>.

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.

Reassessment/Mastery Requirement

Reteaching and reassessing students in grades 5-8 on any Academic Knowledge indicator will be required based on the following guidelines.

Eligibility and Requirements for Student Reassessment

90% - 100% - Students Not Eligible for Reassessment

Rationale: Students have mastered the content; the goal is to focus on mastery and prevent "point chasing."

75% - 89% - Student Needs to Advocate for Reassessment

Rationale: One aspect of effective grading practices is encouraging personal responsibility.

Below 75% - Required Reassessment

Rationale: It is important for students to master the content. We are required to help all students meet the standards.

Grading and Scoring Procedures

1. Scoring a Reassessment

- Students who are reassessed can receive a maximum of 90% as their reassessment score.

Rationale: To avoid point-chasing while also preventing one assignment from setting a student back too far.

Example Original score 4/10 | reassess 10/10 | gradebook earned back 5 total points to 9/10.

2. Gradebook Record Keeping and Communication

- Points earned back are reported in a separate assignment on Canvas labeled **REASSESS** w/original assessment name.
- This REASSESS assignment should be listed as being worth 0 points.
- The additional points earned are added to the original assessment's total.

Rationale: Ensure that initial score is available as well as final grade for purposes of knowing how much support was needed and also for purposes of making effective course recommendations for the future. This process provides better communication to parents on the supports needed for the student to reach mastery.

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 26 - 30, 2027
- Mathematics, Science and Make Ups May 3- May 7, 2027

KEYSTONE TESTING WINDOW

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

- Keystones (Algebra I) May 17 - 28, 2027

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

CANVAS

Canvas is the District-wide learning management system. This system is used to provide parents with a common platform 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 HOUSES

The fall Open House will be held on October 1, 2026. Parents are invited during the evening to view the school and meet the teachers. A brief presentation will be provided in each classroom to outline the curriculum and programs.

The spring Celebration of Learning will be held on May 13, 2027. Parents are invited with their student(s) to have an opportunity to see student work and celebrate the successes of the school year.

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 USCSd 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 *Couch Coin*, 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 Partners in Education (PIE) Committee as well as coordination of events with the Parent Teacher Council (PTC) - such 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 \$60.00 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 PTC. 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 2:00 p.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.

VISITING

School district policy requires that all visitors report to the main office before going to any part of the building. Upon arrival, visitors will be asked to show identification and be registered through the Raptor system to obtain a visitor pass. 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 can be found on the Fort Couch webpage. In order to not interrupt teachers during class, please call the secretary (x3000) 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.

PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES (PEDS) CELL PHONES - Restricted During School Hours, Extenuating Circumstances Only

*The use of personal electronic devices (PEDs) is permitted **only** when authorized by teachers, for brief periods, and in a responsible manner.*

- PEDs, however, may be brought to school but must remain silenced and placed in a cell phone caddy or left in the locker, unless authorized by a teacher.
- Cell phones are *not* permitted on a student's desk.
- Students are *not* permitted to have personal electronic devices in the lunchroom.

Exceptions to the above include:

- Headphones/AirPods/earbuds are not permitted unless directed by the classroom teacher for instructional purposes.
- Smartwatches must be on "Do Not Disturb" mode during instructional hours and are not to be used for texting or calls during class.
- Should a student's Smartwatch pose a disruption to the learning environment, teachers and administration will collaborate with parents. Together, they will utilize the school's tiered behavioral support and response framework to address the issue.

PED usage is never permitted in bathrooms, locker rooms, and swimming pool areas. Further, they are not to be used during any drill that could compromise safety.

A system of tiered behavior support and response will be implemented in the event an infraction occurs.

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.

DRESS CODE FOR STUDENTS

Consistent with Policy 221-Dress and Grooming, 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. Further, Pennsylvania law prohibits discrimination which includes protections for hair/styles and religious head coverings.

DRUG AND ALCOHOL POLICY & PROCEDURE

Our school is committed to maintaining a safe, healthy, and supportive environment where every student can learn. Therefore, the possession, use, sale, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, controlled substances, mood-altering chemicals, unauthorized medications, "look-alike" substances, or related drug paraphernalia is strictly prohibited. These rules apply at all times on school property, including school buildings, campus grounds, parking areas, school buses, and bus stops, as well as at all school-sponsored activities and events, whether they take place on or off campus. To ensure safety, students suspected of alcohol use may be given the opportunity to take a breathalyzer test (Alcoscan); however, refusing to take this test will be treated as a direct violation of school policy.

If a student is suspected of violating these rules, school administrators will conduct a thorough investigation, which can include searching the student and their locker, contacting parents, and confiscating any prohibited items. All suspected substances will be turned over to the police for analysis and potential legal action. Disciplinary actions for violations are serious and can include counselor referrals, out-of-school suspension, expulsion hearings, social and activity probation, mandatory drug and alcohol education or counseling programs, and criminal prosecution. While our school's primary goal is to offer supportive intervention through student assistance teams, students are expected to behave cooperatively with staff, as uncooperative behavior during an investigation will result in more severe consequences.

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 students Monday through Friday beginning at 8:30 AM

until the start of homeroom at 8:50 AM. Multiple lunch options are offered each day during the lunch periods, providing students with well-balanced food options daily. 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

The following info is listed within the [district's compliance notifications](#).

“Student activities, projects, achievements and special events are highlighted throughout the year at the classroom, school and district level through photos, videos and/or articles. Information and images may be shared in the school's yearbook, on the teacher's website; a classroom or school newsletter; the district's website, eAlert emails and/or district-maintained social media; or external news media.

If you do not wish to have your child photographed or videotaped, please notify the district's Student Support Services department in writing as noted below by Sept. 15 of each school year.”

Attn. Student Support Services

Upper St. Clair School District
1775 McLaughlin Run Road
Upper St. Clair, PA. 15241

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 align their behavior with the Bill of Rights (found on page 8 of the handbook), and the core values of *Unity, Success, & Character*. Additionally, Policy 235 provides district insight around student rights and responsibilities and can be found in the District Handbook.

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.

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.

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
- To maintain a focused learning environment, teachers may ask a student to put their water bottle away if it becomes a distraction to themselves or others.
- Water bottles should be kept under the students' desks and away from any technology and / or device

If students do not adhere to the expectations outlined, teachers, parents, and school administrators will partner together to determine appropriate support, accountability, and the best course of action moving forward.

BUS CONDUCT

School buses are school property and students should realize all school rules are in effect while on the bus and at bus stops. In addition, students are permitted to ride only the bus to which they are assigned. The assistant principal must grant special permission to any student requesting to ride a different bus for a very limited period of time. Students may be removed from the bus for misconduct violations. While students are on the bus, the driver is in charge. Bus drivers are to be treated with respect. If a student's behavior is not satisfactory, the driver is required to report the incident to the assistant principal.

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.

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.

VISITORS

- All visitors to Fort Couch must enter the building at the main entrance.
- All visitors age 16 or older must present a valid photo ID upon arrival at the main office.
- Visitors must report to the main office to receive a visitor's badge and to be processed through the Raptor Visitor Management System
- No visitors are allowed during the first or last week of school or the day before a holiday.
- All visitations must be approved in advance by a school Administrator.
- Visitors will be issued and must display a visitor's badge at all times.
- Visitors who do not follow these guidelines will be asked to leave or face criminal prosecution.
- Fort Couch reserves the right to deny a visitor's request if a pre-arranged appointment has not been made.
- Visitors will be escorted to their assigned destinations by school staff.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES AND SCHOOL SAFETY

SCHOOL POLICE, 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.

Fort Couch Middle School is patrolled by sworn school police officers with powers of arrest. Their primary mission is to ensure student safety. Additional security officers are visible throughout the day and during evening hours. Students should report thefts and other appropriate safety information to the school police as soon as possible. As a reminder, school police contact information can be found on the District website under the Safety banner. The Chief of School Police can be reached at (412) 833-1600 ext. 2560.

SAFETY DRILLS

Periodic safety drills are a necessary part of the school district's procedures. For evacuations, students should leave through the designated exits as quickly and quietly as possible when the alarm sounds. All students/staff **must** leave the building. Safety drills are important. For this reason, no disorderly behavior whatsoever will be tolerated. Students are expected to participate in all safety drills.

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.

ATTENDANCE

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Upper St. Clair School district has a comprehensive school attendance policy ([Policy 204](#)) that can be found in the District Handbook. Certain school specific thresholds 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@uscscd.k12.pa.us. Absence notes can also be uploaded directly into FOCUS.

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 multiple 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

ATTENDANCE

Student attendance is calculated by instructional minutes. There are a total of 345 instructional minutes at Fort Couch. Homeroom, Panther Time, and Period 8 count as instructional time. Lunch and passing time between classes do not count toward instructional time.

- Full-day attendance: Present for at least 180 instructional minutes
- Half-day attendance: Present for at least 76 instructional minutes

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 only 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.

DISTRICT INFORMATION

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

Appendix A: Additional Course Information

7th and 8th Grade English Language Arts Course Details

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 to express and receive thoughts. In the curriculum, emphasis is placed on vocabulary expansion through the use of context clues, dictionaries, and word analysis.

Students study various types and styles of written work to develop appreciation and comprehension of written language. They analyze short stories and informational articles for main ideas, deeper meaning, and author's craft. Students also examine how authors use specific details, organization, and point of view to shape meaning.

The English Language Arts curriculum is language rich and integrates reading, writing, literature, language structure, and oral communication. Reading instruction provides students with extensive work in fiction and nonfiction. Teachers differentiate instruction by using multiple texts and assigning texts based on student readiness, ability level, and learning style.

Students are taught sentence patterns, grammar usage, and organization of longer works to strengthen their writing. Grammar is taught as a tool for effective writing, with emphasis on function rather than terminology. Students read complete works of fiction for vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and higher order thinking. Teachers may choose from department approved resources, literature texts, and activities to meet course objectives.

English Language Arts instruction includes reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Students may participate in activities such as dramatizing scenes, taking on the role of a character, writing editorials or advertisements, rewriting stories from a different point of view, and analyzing media to distinguish fact from fiction.

Math Course Details

Grade 7 Math

Students in Grade 7 Pre Algebra study three major areas: applied arithmetic, pre algebra, and pre geometry. The transition to algebra includes work with variables through pattern generalization, formulas, and unknowns in real life contexts. Students represent variables on the number line and coordinate plane.

Geometry lessons focus on measurement, relationships involving lines, angles, and polygons, and the connection between arithmetic, algebra, and measurement. Students revisit large and small numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, zero, negative numbers, powers, decimals, percents, and scientific notation. Problem solving strategies, graphs, combining operations, the Distributive Property, and basic algebra skills help students prepare for Algebra.

Students in Math 7 study many of the same concepts as students in Pre Algebra, with additional emphasis on Number Sense and Algebraic Reasoning. Some Math 8 learning targets, especially those connected to Geometry, are removed so that students can focus more deeply on foundational skills.

An integrated approach allows students to focus on one strand while reviewing and introducing others. Students apply math skills to real life problems, learn the language of math, use technology, and build problem solving skills through practice and review.

Grade 8 Math

Algebra I is a first year algebra course that uses geometry, statistics, and probability to support understanding of linear equations and inequalities. Students extend arithmetic operations to equations involving variables, solve linear sentences, and define functions.

Students also study probability, algebraic fractions, graphing, properties of lines, and slope. Contemporary applications in science and personal finance are used to explore curvilinear functions, compound interest, parabolas, and quadratic equations. Reading and problem solving are emphasized throughout the course, with problem solving strategies embedded in application settings.

At both grade levels, students who need additional support may receive math intervention during the school day. Students who excel in math may receive enrichment based on pretest results and rate of acquisition. Scientific calculators, computers, Chromebooks, and function graphers are incorporated into the program. Scientific calculators are required beginning in the first chapter.

Science Unit Details

Grade 7 Science Units

Scientific Method

Students focus on the scientific method and experimental techniques. They learn how to set up experiments and control variables.

Light

This standards based, inquiry centered unit allows students to explore the properties of light. Students learn about the origin of light, how it travels, what happens when it is blocked, and how light behaves when it strikes different types of mirrors.

Cells

Students are introduced to homeostasis of the cell and learn the correct process for using a microscope to explore plant and animal cells. Content includes cell parts and cell functions. This unit also serves as a foundation for later learning about genetics.

Genetics and Evolution

Students explore theories related to the origin of plants and animals, mutations, inheritance of traits, patterns of inheritance, and natural selection. Students also examine how physical characteristics can be passed down through generations.

Earth's Changing Surface and Man's Impact

Students study the impact people have on Earth's changing surface. Topics include earthquakes, volcanoes, earth processes, faults, causes of earth movement, agriculture, and pollution.

Grade 8 Science Units

Scientific Method

Students continue to focus on the scientific method and experimental techniques. They learn how to set up experiments and control variables.

Intro to Physics

Students explore the physical world and the scientific laws that govern it. Topics include kinetic and potential energy, speed, motion, acceleration, forces, work, power, and gravity. Engineering is also a focus, as students design, build, evaluate, and revise engineering challenges using the design cycle.

Intro to Chemistry

Students study the properties of matter and identify types of matter based on physical and chemical characteristics. Physical properties such as density and melting point or freezing point, along with chemical properties such as reactivity, are used to identify matter. Students also use the periodic table to understand the subatomic structure of the atom and identify characteristics of elements based on their placement on the periodic table.

Astronomy

Students explore Earth, the moon, stars, galaxies, and the universe. They apply laws and theories that govern the physical universe while researching, observing, calculating, and modeling planetary movements and characteristics. Students use the Hertzsprung Russell diagram to identify brightness and magnitude of stars and galaxies. Models help students understand seasons, Earth movements, and the effects of objects in space. Students also explore the challenges of space exploration and colonization.

Social Studies Unit Details

Grade 7 Social Studies Units

European Foundations of America

Students learn about the major groups and individuals involved in European exploration and colonization of North America.

Creation of the United States

Students study the establishment of the Thirteen Colonies and their growing tension with Britain.

The course explores the Revolutionary War and the establishment of an independent United States, with particular focus on the structure and function of the United States Constitution.

Expansion of a Nation

Students study 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 is a key point of focus.

Civil War and Reconstruction

Students investigate the war that divided the United States, including major events, individuals, and costs of the Civil War. The course also addresses Reconstruction and the attempts made to rebuild the nation.

Grade 8 Social Studies Units

Industrialization and Immigration

Students study industrialization in the late 1800s and its transformative effects on America and the world. Students also learn about factors that led to increased emigration to the United States.

Emerging Power and World War I

Students study the ways nations developed world empires. Students also investigate the events that led to the outbreak of the Great War and the effects of the conflict.

The Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression

Students explore changes that took place in the decade after the Great War before studying the Great Depression, including the causes of and responses to the economic disaster of the 1930s.

Prewar Years and World War II

Students focus on World War II, beginning with the events and individuals that led to the war. The unit also addresses major events from the war across the globe and its impact on the world.

Grade 7 Expressive Arts

Art

Students experience a variety of media and artistic processes, with emphasis on process as well as product. Students may work individually and collaboratively on creative projects involving painting, drawing, printmaking, ceramics, and digital art.

Music

Students use vocal training to develop concepts of beat, rhythm, articulation, melody, harmony, tone color, dynamics, form, and appreciation for different musical styles. Students compose a melody, study the four families of instruments, and explore sound production. Students are encouraged to extend their musical learning through Band, Chorus, or Orchestra.

STEAM Design

STEAM Design connects Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math through the design process. Students follow a series of steps to develop solutions to problems while using creativity and innovation. Students may create, test, and improve designs in the Innovation Hub and Maker Space.

CAPS: Consuming and Producing Successfully

In CAPS, students become entrepreneurs by identifying a problem, creating a product based solution, and evaluating the performance of their business idea. Students may develop a business model canvas, budget and pricing model, product name and brand, pitch deck, marketing materials, sales goals, reflections, and a portfolio. Local mentors and volunteers may support authentic learning experiences.

Communication Arts

Students study, analyze, and practice different types of communication, including writing, classroom discussion, media, and speeches. Students also develop skills such as fluency, interviewing, outlining, recitation, and presentation. Literary devices and persuasion techniques may also be included.

Grade 8 Expressive Arts

In Grade 8, students participate in a series of Expressive Arts rotations by selecting courses based on their interests. Students choose from a variety of electives offered in three or six week formats. Available subjects may include Art, Music, STEAM Design, CAPS, Band, Orchestra, Library, and Communication Arts.

Appendix B: Fort Couch Middle School Guide to AI & Academic Integrity

1. What is Academic Integrity?

Academic integrity means being honest, fair, and trustworthy in all of your schoolwork. When you turn in an assignment, it must represent your own thoughts, effort, and learning. Cheating, copying, or lying about how you completed your work is not permitted.

With the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, students must understand a clear rule: **Having AI write your papers, generate your answers, or significantly alter your original work—and then turning it in as your own—is plagiarism.** Your work must always be *your* work.

2. How to Use AI the Right Way (Acceptable Use)

AI should be viewed as a tutor or learning assistant to help you understand concepts, not as a replacement for your own brainpower. Students may use AI in the following ways, **provided they have permission**:

- **Follow Teacher Instructions:** Teachers will explicitly state if AI is allowed on any given assignment or project. If a teacher says no, AI tools must not be used. If you are ever unsure, ask before using them.
- **Clarify Difficult Concepts:** You may ask AI to explain complex topics in simpler terms, define challenging vocabulary words, or provide real-world examples to help you study.
- **Brainstorming and Inspiration:** If you are stuck at the beginning of a project, you may use AI to generate a list of broad ideas to kickstart your own creative process.
- **Protect Personal Privacy:** To maintain digital safety, students must never type personal information—including names, addresses, phone numbers, or passwords—into any AI tool.
- **Practice Transparency (Show Your Work):** If AI was used to assist you in the learning or brainstorming phase, you must credit the tool. Inform your teacher which AI program you used, the prompts you typed, and how the tool helped you.

The chart below outlines the approved levels of AI use for various types of assignments.

AI Academic Integrity Guidelines

Fort Couch educators recognize the capacity of AI and student usage in completing assignments. All teachers are responsible for providing students with notice of whether AI use is permitted on a particular assignment or project. Teachers will reference the following scale for guidance.

0	No AI Allowed (Total Independence)	What it means: You must do 100% of the work completely on your own. The rule: No AI tools can be used at any point. Do you need to report it? No, because you didn't use it.
1	AI for Brainstorming Only (The Spark)	What it means: You can use AI to get unstuck, brainstorm topics, or get a list of creative ideas to start your project. The rule: The AI gives you the <i>spark</i>, but you write every single word yourself. Do you need to report it? No disclosure is required for this level.
2	AI for Editing Only (The Polish)	What it means: You write the assignment yourself first. Then, you can use AI to fix your grammar, make your sentences flow better, or check your spelling. The rule: The AI can edit your words, but it cannot write new paragraphs for you. Do you need to report it? YES. You must tell your teacher you used AI for editing, share the exact prompt (question) you asked the AI, and explain how you checked its work.
3	AI for Specific Tasks (The Assistant)	What it means: Your teacher allows you to use AI to build a specific part of your project (for example: generating an image, writing a short piece of code, or summarizing one difficult article). The rule: You must double-check everything the AI makes and build the rest of the

		project yourself. You are the boss; the AI is just helping with one chore. Do you need to report it? YES. You must tell your teacher exactly what part the AI created, what prompt you used, and how you checked it for accuracy.
4	Full AI Use with You in Charge (The Co-Pilot)	What it means: You can use AI throughout the entire project to help you research, organize, and create. The rule: Even though the AI is helping you the whole time, you are still responsible for the final project. You must fact-check everything, make sure it makes sense, and ensure it meets the assignment goals. You are still responsible for understanding and Do you need to report it? YES. You must clearly explain to your teacher how you used AI at each step, list your prompts, and show how you evaluated the AI's work.

3. When AI Becomes Cheating or Impermissible (Unacceptable Use) and is a violation of District Policy and the Student Code of Conduct

Using AI as a shortcut to avoid doing your own work is not permitted. The following actions are examples of unacceptable use:

- **Copying and Pasting:** You may not copy text generated by an AI and paste it directly into your assignments, essays, or homework and pretend you wrote it.
- **Failing to Verify Facts:** AI can make mistakes or even fabricate (make up) facts and sources. Students are responsible for the accuracy of their work and must always double-check information with trusted sources such as textbooks or library databases.
- **AI-Generated Media**
 - **Cyberbullying:** Using AI to create fake photos, videos, or altered audio ("deepfakes") of students or staff is strictly forbidden. Using AI tools to mock, harass, threaten, or bully any member of the school community will result in immediate disciplinary action, up to and including suspension and law enforcement involvement.

- **Criminal Conduct/Sexual Harassment:** Creating and/or disseminating AI-generated intimate or sexual images is strictly prohibited. This conduct will be referred to law enforcement and will be investigated under the district's policies prohibiting harassment. Violations will result in disciplinary action. Incidents involving dissemination or transmission may be subject to criminal prosecution for unlawful dissemination of an intimate image pursuant to 18 Pa.C.S. § 3131 in addition to any other applicable charges.

Appendix C: Student-Friendly Harassment Explanation

What does harassment look like? <i>(These are examples and this list is not meant to be exhaustive.)</i>	• Name calling that is rude or sexual in nature • Verbally assaulting someone • Spreading rumors about someone • Pushing, grabbing, touching, or pinching someone aggressively or in a sexual way • Using racial, sexual orientation, or ethnic slurs or remarks • Making sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or looks • Showing, sending, or giving sexual photos and messages • Writing graffiti messages about someone on lockers, tables, etc. • Spying on someone in a bathroom or locker room • Flashing or mooning • Pulling at clothing in a sexual way • Sending unwelcomed love messages or overly aggressive phone calls or advances • Blocking someone's way or cornering someone in an aggressive or sexual way • Forcing sexual activity
Where do the rules apply?	• At school and on campus • At school related activities that are not on campus • Outside of the school setting especially if it: ○ Interferes with a student's education ○ Creates a threatening environment ○ Disrupts the operations of the school day
Are these rules just for students?	• No. The District's policies protect all students and adults.
What should I do if I'm being harassed?	1. Tell a teacher, counselor, or principal. 2. <i>Then what happens?</i> ○ The allegation is reported to the principal. ○ You will be asked to put your report in writing. ○ An investigation will ensue that will respect the privacy of all parties. ○ Counseling, mediation, and or discipline could be the result.

What is the potential discipline for violations?	• Counseling within the school • Parent conference • Loss of school privileges • Transfer to another classroom, bus, etc. • Exclusion from school-sponsored activities • Detention/Suspension/Expulsion • Counseling/Therapy outside of school • Referral to the Township Police
Am I protected from retaliation?	• YES! The district prohibits retaliatory behavior against any complaint or participant in the complaint process. • Any party engaging in retaliation action or threats of retaliation shall be subject to discipline.
Where can I find related policies?	School Board Policy Manual BoardDocs 103 - Discrimination-Title IX Sexual Harassment Affecting Students 249 - Bullying-Cyberbullying 249 Bullying-Cyberbullying -Attachment 1 Report Form

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@uscsd.k12.pa.us
412-833-1600, ext. 2062

For Students:
Dr. Lauren Madia
lmadia@uscsd.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.