Potomac Middle School
Parent Handbook A – Z

Kevin J. Smith, Principal
Latanya Haskins, Assistant Principal
Laura Stevenson, Assistant Principal

Staff, Students, and Parents Working Together as One

3130 Panther Pride Drive
Dumfries, VA. 22026
Phone 703.221.4996
Fax 703.221.4998
https://potomacms.pwcs.edu/
Welcome to Potomac Middle School, home of “The Panthers”. It is exciting for us to have you and your child as part of our school community. We know that as we work together, your child’s time with us will be a positive and successful experience.

As a school community, our task is to meet the diverse academic, physical, and creative needs of all students while inspiring them to achieve to their fullest potential. We hope to engage students, educators, parents, and the community in a learning environment of collaboration and educational action. We embrace the cultural diversity of our student body as we all have high stakes as global partners in a technology-driven world.

Our teachers are Highly Qualified and are certified in their area of expertise. They all hold Bachelor and/or master’s degrees from accredited colleges and universities and continuously attend classes and professional development to keep up with current research on learning.

Grade levels collaboratively utilize research-based strategies to teach the Prince William County curriculum and Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) objectives. Continuous assessment provides data to plan for individual student needs. Reading and math literacy skills are emphasized with strong intervention and support. We provide additional support for students who are identified through reading and math screenings. Teachers of ESOL and Special Education instruct students according to their individual education plans either in small groups, self-contained classrooms, or inclusion in the general education classroom.

Potomac’s students expand on their experiences in PE, Chorus, Orchestra, Band, Art, Family and Consumer Science, Business Education, and World Languages. As in every Prince William County School, other supports for our students include a gifted and talented program (SIGNET). Independent Study Periods provides time for remediation and enrichment during the school day.

We believe that all children will learn to their fullest potential in a positive and safe environment. Your support and involvement are encouraged and appreciated to facilitate these aspirations.

This Parent Handbook has been prepared to familiarize you with some of the policies and procedures that are common practice at our school. Please carefully review this handbook and keep it for future reference.
Arrival Time

**School Hours**
- 8:00 AM - 2:25 PM: Building is open to students
- 8:05 AM: Tardy bell rings
- 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM: Front office hours

Our teachers on duty will come into the building to teach at 7:55 AM and students should not be dropped off outside unattended. If you arrive after 8:05 AM, when the tardy bell sounds, and you wish to identify an excused tardy, you should plan to park, and come on in the building with your child to sign them in at the front office.

Students who ride the bus will be unloaded in front and alongside of the school in the bus loop. Please note that personal vehicles are not allowed into the bus loop in front of the school before or during school hours.

**Attendance**

Attendance and punctuality should be a top priority for our parents and students. Research indicates a high correlation in the relationship between a child’s success and his/her attendance at school. The nature of the curriculum necessitates active classroom participation that can never be duplicated in a packet of 'make up work' following a trip or extended absence. Because we know that students need to be available for learning, Prince William County has identified improved student attendance as part of the Strategic Improvement Plan, so we are held directly accountable for our attendance rate as a school community.

Under Virginia law, students are responsible for attending school every day that school is in session. Absences, tardies, and early dismissals must have documented approval from parent and school personnel. Absences shall be excused based on verified contact with the parent. A doctor’s note is typically needed following an extended absence due to illness. The division truancy office monitors attendance and will notify parents when a student develops a pattern of absenteeism or tardiness.

Our computerized attendance system automatically generates a phone call home when a student is marked absent. This is simply a notification system. Please call to leave a message if your child will be absent from school and follow up with a doctor’s note or written excuse with your student when they return. **You may contact our school's Attendance Secretary, Mrs. Samantha Burke office during the day at BurkeSP@pwcs.edu or leave a message after hours at 703-791.4996.**

Please do not send the teacher or Front Office secretary an email of a child’s absence. There are times when the teacher is out sick, and the substitute will not be able to access email accounts. According to PWCS policy, teachers shall not be required to provide work in advance of the absence. Teachers have very little time during the school day without students present, so make up work may not be available until the following day.

There are special circumstances when families decide they need to take a trip causing their student(s) to miss school days. Please contact the front office to gain administrative pre-approval from the principal for all planned absences. Make note: In keeping with division regulation, planned or unexplained absence that extends beyond 14 days will result in automatic withdrawal from school. The parent will be expected to re-enroll the student(s) upon re-entry.
Buses
There is bus transportation available to students who attend our school except for identified car riders who attend PTMS. Bus drivers always maintain safety and discipline and will communicate student Code of Behavior transgressions to administrators to ensure our students maintain our standards of behavior while riding in PWCS vehicles. Students are expected to sit while the buses are moving and maintain proper behavior to ensure that our bus drivers may concentrate while safely driving the vehicle.

For questions regarding bus transportation, please call the Transportation Center at 571.374.6591.
The staff at Potomac Middle School does not have the authority to change routes or pick up/drop off locations.

We will not phone the parents of students when a bus is running late for dismissal, but we will inform our students and send out an automated message or email to families. If you are concerned about a late bus arrival you will want to phone our office and we can confirm when the bus left the school. However, your best point of contact after 4:00 will be the Transportation Center at 571.374.6591. We cannot predict traffic back up or late buses due to inclimate weather. Please be patient as we monitor this process for the safety of our students.

Breakfast
Potomac Middle School has a breakfast program open to all students. Breakfast begins at 7:50 AM. All students who choose to eat breakfast will be provided with a “bag to go” breakfast so they can report to their classroom and enjoy breakfast without delaying their instructional day.

Business Partnerships
Potomac Middle School has established a partnership with community businesses to enhance the educational process for students. We are always interested in adding new business partners. We rely on our business partners to support our endeavors.

C

Code of Behavior
Please carefully read the PWCS Code of Behavior which was given to your child. These are reviewed with all students in September. It is the family’s responsibility to follow all county policies that are outlined in these documents. The signature of the parent and child on the back of the emergency card is our indication that you have read and agreed to the Code of Behavior.

Any look-alike weapons (as described in the Code of Behavior) brought to school will result in disciplinary action. Please also speak with your child about making verbal or physical threats to other students or staff. Such actions create serious situations and consequences.

Computer Lab/Technology
We have both computer lab classrooms and mobile lap top carts for classroom use. All students use technology to extend and enrich their learning. Our classrooms also have computers and SMART Boards that our teachers use to meaningfully engage students every day.
**Communication**
Every effort is made to keep you informed. All our upcoming events and important information can be found on our website or in our weekly Panther Pride Newsletter which goes out every Sunday at 6:00pm.

Please remember to check with your child frequently for information from teachers. Verbal communication is also important to us. Phone calls, conferences, parent surveys, PTSO informational meetings, Potomac Middle School Advisory Council meetings, and Back-to-School Nights (held in September) are just a few of the ways we try to share information with our parents about our educational programs and our students’ progress and accomplishments.

**Conferences**
Potomac Middle School Conferences may be initiated by the parents, teachers, guidance counselor, or an administrator. The conference will be held during teacher’s planning periods or at a mutually agreed upon time.

**Counseling**
Our Counseling Director and four counselors aid students, parents, teachers and other school staff members by conducting activities that involve counseling, consulting, and coordinating classroom lessons. They meet with all students regularly. They also meet with small groups and individuals to address specific concerns and emotional needs. You may contact the counselors for more information or to share concerns that you feel may impact your child’s performance or behavior at school.

Mrs. Dobson, Director of Counseling at DobsonME@pwcs.edu
Ms. Tiffani Brown at BrownTE@pwcs.edu
Mrs. Michelle McPhatter at McPhatMA@pwcs.edu
Mrs. Patrice Richardson at RicharPN@pwcs.edu
Ms. Sarah Sweatman at SweatMSN@pwcs.edu

**Dress Code**
PTMS adheres to the Prince William County Schools dress code policy as outlined in the Code of Behavior. That means students will be held accountable for following the expectations. On some occasions, students will be allowed to dress in their non-standard school clothing (Spirit Weeks). On these occasions, student dress and overall appearance must meet the basic standards of health, safety, cleanliness, and decency. Students are not permitted to wear or display items which represent drugs, alcohol products, gang membership or which promote violence. The Prince William County Schools’ Code of Behavior has addressed several areas that are considered improper dress in any Prince William County school. The following items are not allowed to be worn in school: outside jackets, pants worn below the waistline, hats, scarves, skull caps, headbands, visors or any other type of head covering unless related to one’s religious beliefs or practices, sunglasses, beachwear (including rubber flip-flops), sleeping apparel, undergarments worn as outer garments, clothing that is too short or tight, see-through garments, clothing with suggestive signs, slogans or pictures, bare midriff, strapless, spaghetti straps, tube or tank tops, bare feet, bedroom slippers, socks only, cleats, jewelry or other items which could be regarded or used as a weapon.

Students will be asked to remove these items, or we will try to find a suitable change of clothes for them. If we are unable to do so, a parent will be called to bring appropriate clothing.
Early Dismissal
If it is absolutely necessary that you pick up your student(s) early, a note should be sent to the teacher so that they can prepare your child in a timely manner and you should come to the front office to sign out your child. For safety purposes, no child will be dismissed from the classroom to wait in the office without being signed out in the front office by an approved adult listed on the child’s Emergency Card. Please have a photo ID in hand for the release of the child. Students will only be released to those individuals listed on the emergency card. If a student returns to school the same day, they need to be signed in again.

Please remember that it is strongly discouraged to dismiss students between 2:30 PM and dismissal time at 2:50, unless there is a dire emergency.

Why do we ask that everyone respect this time frame for early dismissal? Our excellent front office staff has a priority to focus on speaking with parents who call in with unexpected emergencies that warrant pulling a child from normal dismissal plans, speaking with transportation regarding late or missing buses. With over a thousand students in our building, this is a timely process that deserves our attention to ensure student safety so please plan accordingly for the benefit of all our students.

According to Regulation 724-1, absences shall be excused for personal illness, medical and dental examination when such appointments CANNOT be scheduled other than during school hours, and observations of religious holidays. Please do not pick up your child early for other reasons. It is very important that they attend school for the full instructional day.

Emergency Cards
Emergency cards must be accurate and on file for each student. All possible telephone numbers to reach a student’s parent/guardian should be included. Please advise the office if there is a change in the information on your child’s emergency card any time during the year and/or update using the Parent Vue System. It is very important that the emergency card addresses, and numbers be kept current. Students may only be released to all adults noted on the student Emergency Card.

Fire Drills
Fire Drills are held once per week during September and monthly throughout the remainder of the year.

Forgotten Items
If you have an item that needs to be delivered to your student the office staff will get it to your child. If you need to talk to your child’s teacher, we will be happy to deliver a message for you. If your child forgets their belongings on the school campus, it is often delivered to our school Lost & Found. The items in our Lost & Found left unclaimed will be donated to an area charity at least three times per year. PLEASE write your child’s name inside their jackets to minimize the confusion.
**Gifted & Talented**
SIGNET is Prince William County’s program for identified gifted students.

**Grading**
In keeping with PWCS Regulation 661-1, teachers will provide grades and use the following conversion table for marking period grades:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>.01-.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The high school numerical grading scale will apply to 8th grade students. Sixth and Seventh grade students will use the letter grading system. Teachers will keep grades in the grade book that will be averaged to determine the nine-week grade.

A student who fails to complete 65% of the assigned work shall be subject to failure for that marking period. As a rule, teachers will collect at least two achievement grades per student per week in each subject area.

Unit tests, quizzes, projects, and homework papers shall be given varying grade weights according to the material covered. Teachers will communicate the system of grade weights to the students. Classroom teachers will update student grades using Power Teacher Grade book on Parent Portal.

Students will receive an interim report at the 4.5-week mark in the quarter and a report card at the end of each quarter. Students must be enrolled in our school for a minimum of 15 days to receive an interim or report card. Please contact your child’s teacher if you have concerns or would like a conference to review your child’s progress.

**Homework**
The purpose of homework is to provide out of class activities or projects which enrich, enhance and extend the instructional program. Homework teaches students self-discipline, self-direction, and responsibility. Completing homework cultivates good study habits and fosters initiative. Homework assignments vary according to grade level and may include work in reading, writing, math, language arts, science and social studies. You will receive information from your child’s teacher for individual homework information.
Illness
If your child becomes ill while at school we will notify you by phone to come and pick up your child. It is the expectation that students will be picked up in a timely manner. Be sure that you give the office an up-to-date local emergency telephone number on the Emergency Card so that you may be contacted promptly. Please keep your children at home if they are ill.

Join
Join in on the fun by becoming a member of the PTA, attend school events and volunteer at school or from home. We always need volunteers for PTA events, field day, book fairs, and field trips. With a large school community like ours, you can quickly get to know many other parents simply by getting involved!

Keepsakes
Remember to order a Yearbook and other keepsakes provided throughout the school year.

Lunch
Our division wide Healthy Youth Initiatives are focused on providing balanced school lunches, drinks and snacks in our Panther Café. Students will not be allowed to bring fast food into the café during lunch.

Lunch Accounts and Meals
Students may purchase breakfast and lunch daily. Parents may write a check made out to Prince William County-Food Services (PWCS-FS). Please indicate your child’s first and last name on the memo section of the check. For your convenience, you may pre-pay with a credit or debit card on line that will be credited to your child’s lunch account by going to www.mylunchmoney.com. We highly recommend that parents make use of this system since it also provides an opportunity for the parent to monitor what their child is purchasing. Please get your child’s student ID number and register for an account with My Lunch Money.

From the Parent Information link on our school web site you can also access the Cafeteria page. There is a link from there to access My Lunch Money, also. This page offers valuable information regarding all Food and Nutrition Services. PWCS provides the lunches at our school.
Medication
Every effort should be made for students to take their medications at home. If taking medicine at school is necessary, parents must deliver the medicine to school in the prescription container and it must not exceed the expiration date. **PWCS policy does not permit students to transport medication to and from school. All medication must be stored with the school nurse.** A PWCS Medical Authorization form, signed by a physician, must be completed for school staff to administer prescription medication. This form is available in the school clinic and online. Any changes in medication must be submitted on a new authorization form. All medicines will be discarded on the last day of school if not picked up by the parent. Please contact our nurse Ms. Ayanna Randall, RN at RandalAW@pwcs.edu if you have any concerns or questions. Plan to check out her Clinic Information web page from the Parent Information link on our web site.

Newsletters
The Principal’s weekly newsletter will be available to families each Sunday Evening at 6:00pm and on our school web site. This newsletter is filled with timely updates and reminders to keep all our PTMS families in the know about the many wonderful events that take place.

Opportunities
We provide opportunities for parents to get involved at Potomac Middle School because we believe that having you as a partner will help your child achieve more. Help at the next book fair or help re-shelve books in the library. Volunteer to serve as a field trip chaperone. We always need many volunteers at field day. Support our staff with positive feedback recognizing their efforts that always go above and beyond to make each day of learning filled for our Panthers! Join our PTA and lend a hand to make one of our amazing family events a greater success. With so many students and families at PTMS, we still only have a hand full that get highly involved to make our PTA the amazing group that it is. Join us! Information is posted on our school web site.
**Parent Pick Up in the Building**

Parent pick up for early dismissal takes place in the office no later than 2:30 PM. After picking up your child you are asked to exit through the front entrance of the school. Thank you for working cooperatively with our staff.

**Principal’s Advisory Council**

Our Principal’s Advisory Council (PAC) generates community input through elected parent members and teachers. We look at our school’s continuous improvement in achieving division and school goals outlined in the annual Strategic Plan. Representatives and community members, consisting of parents as well as teachers, meet on the third Thursday of the month.

**Parking & Traffic Congestion**

Parking is very limited during special events and especially during dismissal. If you need to park and come into the building, please do not park along the yellow “No Parking Zone” curbs. The outer lot will have the most parking available. Do not park in the Receiving Area, which needs to remain clear for deliveries. There are designated Handicap Parking spots located in the main lot. Only vehicles with DMV approved stickers should use those parking spaces.

We appreciate our PTMS parents cooperating with the safety expectations.

Please, be safe and remember:

1. It is illegal to pass a school bus loading or discharging students. (Code of Virginia 46.2-844).
2. The school bus always has the right of way.

**Questions???”

Our staff works diligently to provide frequent communication through phone calls, emails, newsletters, and web pages. We do understand that questions will arise so we encourage you to phone our front office who will direct your call to the appropriate staff member. Our teachers respond within 24-48 hours to email so don’t hesitate to email your child’s teacher if you would like a conference or have a question. Please visit our school web site to read the most recent edition of our Parent Handbook A-Z, list of upcoming events, school calendar, and teacher pages for the answers to many of your questions.

**Response to Intervention**

At PTMS, we provide differentiation to build reading proficiency through a balanced literacy approach every day in our classrooms. We also provide targeted reading intervention for students who are identified through universal screening. The Reading Specialist Team and the classroom teacher regularly monitors progress and plans interventions. Through the focus of our Reading Specialist Team, we work collaboratively to increase reading proficiency for our students.
School Photos
Pictures are a vital part of telling the PWCS story. According to current policies and regulations, photographs and video images of any student engaged in school activities may be produced and used in any School Division program, publication, or exhibit, if deemed appropriate by the principal or other School Division designee. Photos and images may also be authorized for use by external entities, such as the news media and scholarship providers, so long as this is in the best interests of students, the school and School Division, and complies with other regulation guidelines. Any parent wishing to avoid use of student photos and images by external organizations may fill out and submit an opt-out form to be given to the Principal at the start of the school year. The form, along with the complete text of the relevant regulation (790-4) may be found online at http://pwcs.edu/Admin/prcs/admin_pdfs/R790-4.pdf.

School Wide Discipline Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)
At PTMS, we believe all students, staff, and parents should feel safe, comfortable and respected while at school. We are committed to ensuring that students are not being distracted from learning. We work together to create an environment where teachers can teach, and students can learn. In order to achieve these goals, we have developed our Effective School Wide Discipline Program. We use common behavior communication forms and expectations school wide for consistency.

Substitute Teachers
Your child may have a substitute teacher on occasion when their classroom teacher needs to be out for the day. We try our very best to find quality and experienced substitutes. All our substitutes are given academic plans to follow while the teacher is absent so the learning process will continue. Most substitutes are degree and have a long-standing record of success in our building. The Grade Level teams work with the “Subs” to ensure continuation of curriculum.

Tardies
All students should be in their classrooms on time to avoid being tardy. Students who arrive after the tardy bell has rung should be accompanied by a parent to sign in at the front office then obtain a Tardy Pass from the secretary in the office. Students who ride the bus will NEVER be considered tardy.

Unity
Unify and work together with your child’s teacher. We believe the African Proverb that reminds us that “If you want to go faster, go alone. If you want to go farther, go together.”
Visiting School

For the safety and security of our children, all visitors and volunteers in the building during school hours must report to the office to sign in. Prince William County Schools require that photo identification be left with the secretary. You will be given a visitor’s badge that must always be visibly worn. Your photo identification will be returned to you when you sign out and return your visitor’s badge. (Regulation 501.06-1)

Volunteers

All volunteers should have a signed copy of PWCS Guidelines for Volunteering acknowledgement on file in the office. Because we value the learning dynamic in each of our classrooms, parents should not wander down the hallways nor drop in on a classroom. This is disruptive to the instructional process for all students in the room. Please bear in mind that the beginning and closing of the school day is a very busy, teacher intensive preparation time with students and not an appropriate time to converse with your child’s teacher. If you wish to talk with a teacher, please leave a message with the office for the teacher to contact you as soon as possible or email your child’s teacher.

Website

The web address is http://potomacms.pwcs.edu/ you can also go to the Prince William County website at www.pwcs.edu, click on school listings and then scroll down until you see our school. Our school website is updated weekly with important calendar events and reminders. You can also access the weekly school newsletter from the Principal’s Page and class updates from each teacher’s or grade level web page. School closings, delays, and early dismissals that are called by PWCS is also posted on our school website. Mark our page as a favorite and check our web site regularly!

Expectations

We are the Potomac Panthers. We are a community whose members know that they are valued and respected. We will choose each day to strive for excellence: in our school, in our friendships, and most importantly in ourselves.

At Potomac Middle, it is the expectation that all students:
Help and honor others
Offer our best academic effort and behavior
Always respect all people
Never quit
Expect to be successful
Take the time to care
Support each other as we learn
**Yearbook sales**
Yearbook sales are advertised in winter or early spring. You will be able to purchase yearbooks by check or cash ONLY. Yearbooks are handed out to the student(s) who ordered them during the last week of the school year. Please save your canceled check or credit receipt to verify purchase in case of a lost order in June.

**Zeros**
To avoid zero grades for failing to not hand in (NHI) an assignment, please support your child at home by providing support in an area at home that is suitable for academic studies.

We thank you in advance for your support as we work together to guide students in becoming responsible citizens of our country and our world.