



Middle School Advanced Scholars Program

Student & Learning Coach Handbook

Welcome

Welcome to the **PA Virtual Middle School Advanced Scholars Program!**

At PA Virtual, we believe every student deserves the opportunity to reach their highest potential. Our Middle School Advanced Scholars Program is designed for academically advanced students in grades 5–8, including students with a Gifted Individualized Education Program (GIEP).

This engaging afternoon enrichment program challenges students to think beyond the traditional classroom through advanced, project-based learning experiences. Students explore exciting career pathways, participate in academic competitions, and tackle real-world problems that encourage innovation and creative thinking. Through collaborative projects and in-depth investigations, they strengthen their understanding of core academic subjects while developing essential skills in critical thinking, communication, leadership, and problem-solving.

As part of the program, students have opportunities to showcase their learning by leading presentations during Middle School assemblies, building confidence while sharing their work with peers and the school community. The course is graded on a pass/fail basis, allowing students to focus on exploration, growth, and academic excellence rather than traditional letter grades.

The Middle School Advanced Scholars Program empowers students to discover their passions, expand their potential, and build the skills needed for success in high school, college, and future careers.

Program Goals

Students will:

- Develop advanced critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
 - Engage in inquiry-based and project-based learning.
 - Conduct authentic research.
 - Strengthen communication, writing, and presentation skills.
 - Collaborate with peers on meaningful projects.
 - Make interdisciplinary connections across multiple content areas.
 - Develop independence and ownership of their learning.
 - Explore career pathways and real-world applications of academic content.
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Eligibility

Students may be considered for the Advanced Scholars Program on a year-to-year basis if they meet **at least three of the following criteria**, including the required assessment criterion.

Required Academic Assessment: Students must meet the following:

- Score **Advanced** on at least one Pennsylvania PSSA assessment from the previous school year (ELA, Mathematics, or Science, when applicable).

Additional Criteria: Students should also meet **at least two** of the following:

- **Map Growth Score**
 - Earn a **MAP Growth score at or above the 90th national percentile** in Reading or Mathematics on the most recent administration.
- **Teacher Recommendation**
 - Recommendation from a current teacher indicating the student consistently demonstrates advanced academic ability, critical thinking, independence, and intellectual curiosity.
- **Academic Performance**
 - Maintain an overall average of **90% or higher** (or equivalent A-/B+ average) in core academic courses.
- **Attendance**
 - Maintain satisfactory attendance (recommended 95% or higher) unless documented medical circumstances exist.
- **Behavior and Citizenship**
 - Demonstrate positive citizenship with no significant disciplinary concerns and consistently meet school expectations.
- **Motivation for Advanced Learning**
 - Submit a brief student interest statement explaining why they would like to participate in the program and how they are prepared for increased academic rigor (optional but encouraged).

Review Process

Placement decisions will be made by the administration and guidance counselors, who will consider all available student data. Students with a current Gifted Individualized Education Program (GIEP) are automatically eligible for the Advanced Scholars Program. Meeting the minimum eligibility requirements does not automatically guarantee placement, as the committee considers the student's overall readiness for advanced coursework.

Advanced Scholars Learning Experience

Instruction is designed around inquiry, collaboration, and authentic learning experiences.

Students can expect to:

- Ask meaningful questions and investigate real-world problems.
- Conduct research, communicate their thinking through writing, and design innovative solutions.
- Work collaboratively with peers and demonstrate respect for others.
- Reflect on their learning and take intellectual risks by embracing challenges.
- Participate actively in discussions and be prepared for class.
- Complete projects and assignments by established deadlines.
- Present their work to various audiences.
- Maintain academic honesty and integrity.
- Seek assistance when needed to support their growth and success.

Curriculum

Instruction integrates multiple subject areas, including:

- English Language Arts
- Writing
- Mathematics
- STEELS (Science, Technology & Engineering, Environmental Literacy, and Sustainability)
- Social Studies/History
- Career Education

Learning experiences are aligned with Pennsylvania Academic Standards and support continued success on the PSSAs while extending learning beyond grade-level expectations.

Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) serves as the foundation of the Advanced Scholars Program.

Each instructional unit may include:

- One major interdisciplinary project
- One authentic product
- One research component
- One written reflection

- One student presentation
- One peer feedback opportunity

Projects emphasize authentic audiences, creativity, collaboration, and real-world application.

Research Expectations & Presentation Types

Students will complete:

- One inquiry investigation for every instructional unit
- Two formal research projects each school year
- One independent passion project annually

Students will regularly present their learning throughout the school year. Presentation opportunities may include:

- Classroom Presentations
- Showcase Presentations
- Internal Competitions
- External Competitions

Students will have opportunities to present to audiences beyond their classroom, including families, school administrators, peers, community members, and industry or community partners when appropriate.

Academic Expectations

Students are expected to:

- Complete assignments on time.
- Participate actively during live classes.
- Collaborate respectfully with classmates.
- Demonstrate academic integrity.
- Accept feedback and revise work when appropriate.
- Take ownership of their learning.

Because instruction is rigorous and collaborative, regular participation is essential.

Attendance Expectations

Students are expected to attend live class sessions consistently and participate actively in discussions, collaborative activities, and project work.

Frequent absences may impact a student's ability to successfully complete projects and meet program expectations.

Grading

The Advanced Scholars Program is evaluated on a **Pass/Fail** basis.

- **Pass:** Final average of **80% or higher**
- **Fail:** Final average below **80%**

Students earning below an 80% may participate in a review to determine continued placement in the program.

Advanced Scholar Students Common Traits & Characteristics

1. Academic Excellence

- Maintains consistently high grades across various subjects.
- Actively engages in class discussions and demonstrates a deep understanding of the material.
- Takes on challenging coursework and excels in honors or advanced classes.

2. Strong Work Ethic

- Demonstrates a strong commitment to learning and is dedicated to their studies.
- Completes assignments on time and with a high level of accuracy.
- Shows initiative in seeking additional knowledge beyond the standard curriculum.

3. Curiosity and Critical Thinking

- Asks thoughtful questions and demonstrates curiosity about the subject matter.
- Applies critical thinking skills to analyze information and solve problems.

4. Positive Attitude

- Maintains a positive and enthusiastic approach to learning.
- Encourages and supports classmates, creating a positive and inclusive learning environment.

5. Effective Communication

- Expresses ideas clearly and articulately, both in writing and verbally.

- Collaborates well with peers and teachers, fostering a positive and communicative classroom environment.

6. Responsibility and Organization

- Manages time effectively and stays organized with assignments and deadlines.
 - Takes responsibility for their own learning and academic success.
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Learning Coach Partnership

Learning Coaches play an important role in student success and are encouraged to:

- Monitor student progress.
 - Encourage consistent attendance.
 - Support project completion.
 - Communicate with teachers when concerns arise.
 - Celebrate student accomplishments.
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Technology Expectations

Students will use a variety of digital tools to:

- Conduct research
- Collaborate with classmates
- Create presentations
- Design multimedia projects
- Build digital portfolios

Technology is used to enhance learning, not replace meaningful instruction or critical thinking.

Program Participation Review

Participation in the Advanced Scholars Program is reviewed throughout the school year and annually to ensure students are meeting program expectations.

Students are expected to continue demonstrating:

- Academic success
- Consistent effort
- Positive attendance
- Responsible behavior
- Engagement in program activities

Students who experience concerns related to academic performance, attendance, behavior, or participation may be reviewed at any point during the school year. Families will be notified if concerns arise and may be asked to participate in a conference to discuss appropriate supports and next steps.

Meeting the program's eligibility and participation expectations each year allows students to continue participating in the Advanced Scholars Program.

Questions

Questions regarding the Middle School Advanced Scholars Program or your student's coursework may be directed to the Middle School Advanced Scholars teacher.

We look forward to partnering with your family to provide an engaging, challenging, and rewarding learning experience for your student.