

alpha



717.447.2655

WWW.MCALPHA.ORG



Staff Spotlight Mrs. Bender

Mrs. Bender is the Learning Management Systems Educator for the Alpha Program. This is her sixth year with Alpha, and the thing she loves about the program is helping students customize their learning paths.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Monday, August 17, 2026
Skyward Family Access for
Students and
Parents/Guardians

Monday August 31, 2026
First Day for Students

Friday, September 4, 2026
Act 80 Day - No School for
Students

Monday, September 7, 2026
Labor Day - No School for
Students

Wednesday, September 9, 2026
Back-to-School Night at MCHS
for grades 6-12 Alpha Students



Welcome and Welcome Back!

New Year. New Goals. New Opportunities...and an Incredible Journey Lies Ahead.

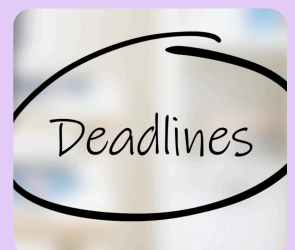
As we begin a new school year, there is an undeniable sense of excitement and possibility throughout our Alpha program! A new year brings new goals, new opportunities, and a renewed commitment to helping every student find success.

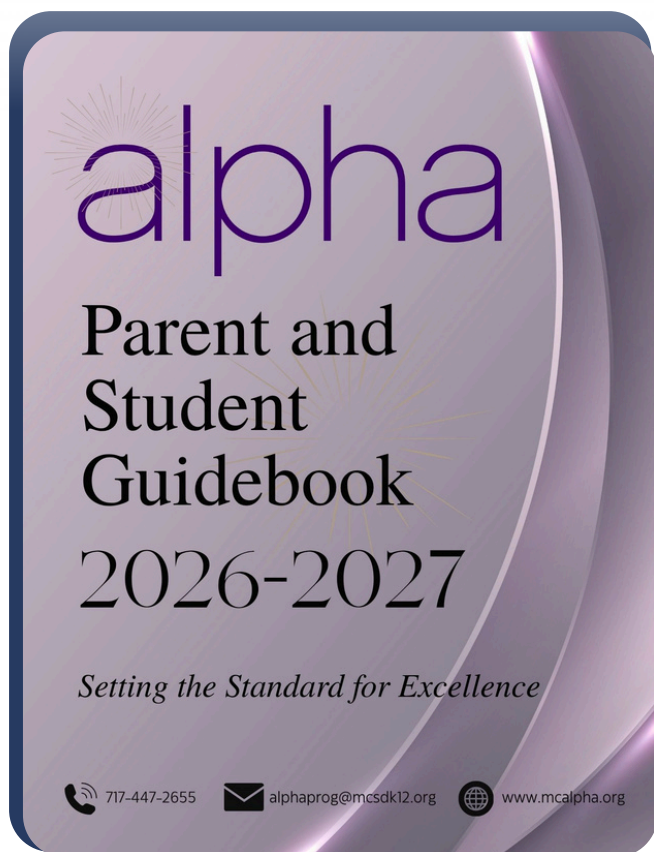
As we begin another year we are focused on building connections, encouraging growth, and making sure every student knows that they matter. Our flexible, personalized approach allows students to learn in ways that meet their individual needs while still benefiting from the support, relationships, and resources of the Mifflin County School District. We look forward to seeing our students set goals, overcome challenges, celebrate accomplishments, and make this another outstanding year for our program. **Welcome back, Huskies! Together, let's make it a great year!**

Christopher M. Gill
Administrator of Online Programs

DROP/ADD DEADLINE

Students have until **Friday, September 4** to drop or add an online course. Please note: students are not in school that day due to an Act 80 day, so any changes must be discussed with your school counselor before September 4. Don't wait — start the conversation early to make sure your schedule is set for success!





2026-2027 PARENT AND STUDENT GUIDEBOOK

For all things Alpha, our 2026-2027 Alpha Parent and Student Guidebook is a must-have resource! How attendance is completed, transportation availability, laptop use, tutoring options, athletic eligibility, and more can be found at the link below. The guidebook should be considered a dynamic publication, as we expect periodic updates due to some recent changes to cyber education at the state level, so you may see changes each time you open the document or refresh.

[Alpha 2026-2027 Parent and Student Guidebook](#)

NEW

ATTENDANCE PROCEDURES FOR FULL-TIME ALPHA STUDENTS

Full-time Alpha students will not be required to sign into Skyward for their daily attendance. However, full-time students will need to meet minimum daily activity, cumulative weekly activity, or maintain academic pace according to the online platform's Target Due Dates. For more information, please refer to the Parent and Student Guidebook or reach out to the Alpha Staff.



NEW

MANDATORY WELLNESS CHECKS FOR FULL-TIME ALPHA STUDENTS

Recent changes in Pennsylvania state law, amending the PA School Code, now require all full-time virtual students to be seen and heard by school personnel at least once per week. Students can fulfill this requirement by coming to Alpha during the week or participating in a Zoom session on Fridays. More details are included in the infographic below as well as the guidebook. Please note that failure to meet this requirement could result in dismissal from online learning. Please reach out to Alpha staff if you have any questions.

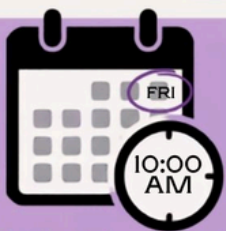


Alpha Virtual Student Wellness: Weekly Check-In & Compliance Guide



Under Pennsylvania HB 1505 (Section 1327.4 of the PA School Code), all full-time virtual students must participate in weekly wellness checks to verify their well-being and participation. Alpha implements this through a specific weekly schedule that escalates from digital outreach to in-person home visits if a check is missed.

The Weekly Routine



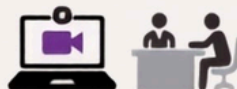
Friday Morning Wellness Check at 10:00 AM

All full-time Alpha virtual students must join the weekly Wellness Check via Zoom if they have not been seen and heard by Alpha Staff during the week. Joining this Zoom satisfies the requirement of the wellness check for the week.



Live Visual & Verbal Interaction

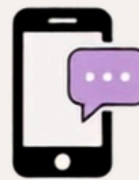
Students must be seen visually and speak in real-time with school staff.



Alternative Verification Methods

Zoom conferencing with an Alpha instructor or attending Alpha in-person also satisfies the weekly requirement.

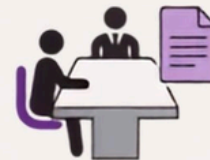
Escalation Timeline for Missed Checks



Within 1 Day of Wellness Check:

If the student has not been seen and heard during the week and misses the Friday Zoom Wellness Check, Alpha contacts parents within one school day via

*ParentSquare to alert the parent of the missed Wellness Check.



Wednesday: Wellness Review Conference

A mandatory Wellness Review Conference must be held if the student is not seen and heard from within three days of the previous Friday's Wellness Check.



Thursday: In-Person Home Visit

If the Wellness Review Conference is missed, a mandatory home visit by school personnel occurs by the end of the school day on Thursday.

*ParentSquare message will alert the recipient that the student was not seen or heard by Alpha Staff during the previous week and must now arrange an alternate time to be seen and heard prior to 10:00 am on the following Wednesday. This message will also include a time on Wednesday for the Wellness Review Conference if needed.

STAY INFORMED



All Alpha students are students of their respective building based schools (Mifflin County Middle School, Mifflin County Junior High School, Mifflin County High School, and the Academy). We encourage all students and parents to review newsletters from your respective school to stay informed. The links are provided below.

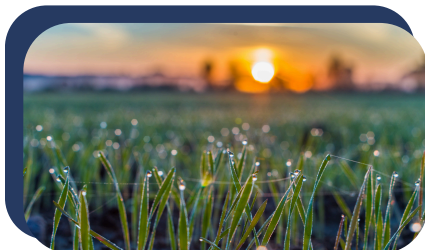
[MIFFLIN COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL NEWSLETTER](#)
[MIFFLIN COUNTY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER](#)
[MIFFLIN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL NEWSLETTER](#)
[THE ACADEMY NEWSLETTER](#)

ALPHA EXTENDED HOURS

The Alpha program is open from 3:30 pm to 6:00 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This is a great opportunity for students to take exams or to get some extra assistance from two of our Alpha teachers in a low-key environment. We encourage our students to take advantage of this opportunity when needed. **Our first Extended Hours day will be Thursday, September 10th.**



MORNING HOURS



Alpha classroom C207, next to the Alpha Staff Office, is open every school day, starting at 7:30 am. Students may arrive via Door 18 at the back corner of MCHS or by signing out of the MCHS cafeteria. This is another excellent opportunity to receive assistance or take exams.

7 Ways Parents Can Support Online Learners

1. Help Establish a Routine

Create a consistent daily schedule for schoolwork, breaks, meals, activities, and sleep. A predictable routine helps students know what is expected and reduces procrastination.

2. Create a Productive Learning Space

A dedicated, reasonably quiet place for schoolwork can help students transition into “school mode.” It doesn't have to be elaborate—consistency is more important than perfection.

3. Encourage Students to Check Their Own Progress

Rather than always asking, “Did you do your work?”, try questions such as:

“What are you working on today?”

“What is your goal for this week?”

“What assignments do you still need to complete?”

“Is there anything you need help understanding?”

This helps develop executive functioning and independence.

4. Encourage Communication with Teachers

Teach students to reach out when they are confused, falling behind, or struggling with an assignment. Learning to advocate for themselves is an important part of becoming an independent learner.

5. Monitor Without Hovering

Parents should be aware of attendance, grades, assignments, and overall progress, but students also need opportunities to take ownership. Support the student without doing the work for the student.

6. Celebrate Progress—Not Just Grades

Recognize effort, persistence, improved organization, meeting a goal, asking for help, or making progress after a difficult week. These small victories can build confidence and a growth mindset.

7. Stay Connected With Alpha

Communication between home and school is especially important in an online environment. If you notice a change in your student's motivation, engagement, attendance, or academic progress, reach out to the Alpha team early. We would much rather work with a family when a small concern first appears than wait until it becomes a larger problem.

A simple message for parents

Your role isn't to sit beside your student all day. Your role is to help your student learn how to manage the day. Encourage routines, ask questions, monitor progress, celebrate growth, and help your student develop the confidence to take ownership of their education. At Alpha, we want parents to know that you are not in this alone—we are partners in helping your student succeed.

SECONDARY STUDENT HANDBOOK

At Alpha we strive to create a safe, respectful, and engaging learning environment for all students. To support this goal, we ask that families review the Student Handbook for Secondary Education, which outlines important policies, expectations, and guidelines. The handbook can be found on the MCSD website or [at this link](#). We encourage parents and guardians to read through the handbook with their student to ensure everyone is familiar with school rules, attendance policies, and behavior expectations. Please note that as policy updates occur, there may be changes to the Student Handbook.

COMPLAINT PROCEDURES – MCSD POLICY 906

The Alpha program is committed to maintaining a positive and responsive school environment. If you have a concern or complaint about Board policy and procedures, programs, personnel, operations or facilities, concerns should be addressed directly with the teacher, staff member, or administrator involved. Many issues can be resolved through open and respectful communication. More information on complaint procedures is provided in Policy 906 of the MCSD Policy Manual.

REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS – MCSD POLICY 105.1

Mifflin County School District School Board Policy 105.1 requires annual notification to parents/guardians and students that parents/guardians and students have an opportunity to review instructional materials and have access to information about the curriculum, including academic standards to be achieved, instructional materials and assessment techniques. Requests to review instructional materials and access information about the curriculum, including academic standards to be achieved, instructional materials and assessment techniques should be made by submitting a written request to the building principal.

INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPLIES – MCSD POLICY 110

The building principal will be responsible to ensure that no student in the school is denied participation in any school program for financial reasons and that the privacy of each student is protected. The principal will use the guidelines of the free and reduced price lunch program to determine the ability of students to provide necessary school supplies. Parents/Guardians must complete the Application For Instructional Supplies and submit required documentation when requesting free instructional supplies for students. Please contact the principal for more information and to request the application.

MCSD POLICY AND SCHOOL BOARD INFORMATION

Please visit the Mifflin County School District website for information regarding Board Policies, Agendas, and Minutes. Information on this site also includes the current school board members and school board meeting dates.

Please visit the following link <https://www.mcSDK12.org/school-board/>.



alpha

Parent and Student Guidebook 2026-2027

Setting the Standard for Excellence



717-447-2655



alphaprogram@mcsdk12.org



www.mcalpha.org



alpha



2026-2027 STUDENT AND PARENT GUIDEBOOK

Table of Contents

Welcome Message	page 3
Disclaimer	page 4
Mission and Values	page 4
Communication and Support	page 5
Daily Attendance Procedures for Part-time(hybrid) Students	page 6
Daily Attendance Procedures for Full-time Students	page 6
Virtual Student Wellness Checks for Full-time Students	page 7
“Alpha Home” Scheduling	page 9
Enrollment Process	page 10
Extra-curricular Participation	page 11
Technology	page 11
Transportation	page 11
Extended Hours	page 11
Athletic Eligibility	page 12
Alpha Marking Periods	page 12

Dear Students and Families,

Welcome to the Alpha Program! We are excited to welcome both new and returning students and families to our award-winning online learning community.

At Alpha, we believe that every student deserves a learning experience that is flexible, personalized, and designed to support individual success. As a program within the Mifflin County School District, Alpha offers students the opportunity to benefit from innovative online learning while maintaining access to the resources, support, and opportunities available through a public school district.

Our program is built on the belief that learning should meet students where they are. Through personalized support, flexible pacing, and hybrid learning opportunities, Alpha empowers students to take ownership of their education while receiving guidance from caring and dedicated teachers. Unlike many cyber programs, Alpha combines the flexibility of online learning with direct access to in-person educators and support staff who are committed to helping students achieve their academic and personal goals.

This guidebook has been developed to provide students and families with important information about program expectations, policies, procedures, and available resources. We encourage you to review it carefully and refer to it throughout the school year, as periodic updates are expected. Understanding these guidelines will help ensure a successful partnership between students, families, and staff.

Success in Alpha requires commitment, communication, and active engagement. We encourage students to take responsibility for their learning, maintain consistent progress in their courses, attend required meetings and activities, and reach out for support whenever needed. Our staff is dedicated to helping every student overcome challenges, celebrate achievements, and build the skills necessary for future success.

We are proud of our students' accomplishments and grateful for the trust families place in us. Whether the goal is credit recovery, academic advancement, flexible scheduling, or a personalized pathway to graduation, we are honored to be part of every child's educational journey.

Thank you for choosing the Alpha Program. We look forward to partnering with you for a successful and rewarding school year.

Welcome to Alpha and the Alpha Advantage!

Christopher M. Gill
Administrator of Online Programs
Mifflin County School District

Disclaimer

This Parent and Student Guidebook is intended to serve as an informational resource for students and families participating in online learning through the Mifflin County School District Alpha Program. It provides guidance on program expectations, procedures, and resources for students enrolled in online courses within the district.

This guidebook is not intended to replace or supersede official Board policies, procedures, or administrative regulations. All policies adopted by the Mifflin County School District Board of School Directors apply equally to students enrolled in the Alpha Program unless otherwise noted. In the event of any conflict between this guidebook and an official Board policy, the Board policy shall prevail.

Parents and students are encouraged to review the district's official policies and building-specific handbooks, available on the Mifflin County School District website.

- www.mcsdk12.org

The information contained in this guidebook is subject to change as district policies, procedures, state laws, and program requirements are updated. Families will be notified of significant changes as appropriate.

Our Mission and Values

At Alpha, we are dedicated to nurturing intellectual curiosity, promoting personal growth, and instilling a strong sense of community. Our core values include:

- **Excellence:** Striving for the highest standards in academics and personal conduct.
- **Integrity:** Upholding honesty, respect, and responsibility in all our actions.
- **Innovation:** Encouraging creativity, critical thinking, and a passion for lifelong learning.
- **Collaboration:** Working together to achieve common goals and support one another.

Communication and Support

Chris Gill	Alpha Program Supervisor	717.447.2655	cmg29@mcsdk12.org
Meg Frank	Alpha Guidance Secretary	717.447.2655	mmf01@mcsdk12.org
Suzi Bender	LMS Educator	717.447.2655	slb24@mcsdk12.org
Jamie Beeler	Math Teacher	717.447.2655	jcb02@mcsdk12.org
Joelle Gill	Social Studies Teacher	717.447.2655	jg29@mcsdk12.org
Candice Gilliland	ELA Teacher	717.447.2655	crg44@mcsdk12.org
Jenna Hackenberger	Special Education Teacher	717.447.2655	jeh46@mcsdk12.org
Kaydee Knouse	Science Teacher	717.447.2655	klk03@mcsdk12.org
Kayla McCoy	ELA Teacher	717.447.2655	kem46@mcsdk12.org
Kimbra Shoop	Special Education Teacher	717.447.2655	kas31@mcsdk12.org
Abigail Yearick	Math Teacher	717.447.2655	avy17@mcsdk12.org

Daily Attendance Procedures for Part-time(hybrid) Students

Following the proper daily attendance procedure for a student with a part-time(hybrid) schedule depends on their **Period 1 schedule**.

If the student has a building class scheduled for Period 1, then daily attendance is satisfied by completing the proper in-person building procedure. For high school and junior high, **students must sign in to the keypads prior to 8:10 am**.

If the student has an online course scheduled for Period 1, then daily attendance is satisfied by completing the proper online attendance procedure. For high school and junior high students, **they must sign in to Skyward between 6:00 am and 8:10 am**.

*Note: If a student has both a Period 1 building class and an online course scheduled during Period 1, the building class determines the attendance procedure.

Daily Attendance Procedures for Full-time Students

Daily attendance is satisfied by course activity time in the student's online coursework.

Full-time students are required to complete at least **3 hours of coursework activity each day or a cumulative of 15 hours of coursework Monday through Sunday**. For every 3 hours of activity time the student completes, the student is credited for 1 day of attendance. Attendance for the previous week is adjusted by Alpha staff the following week, after reviewing the students' activity time for the previous week. Students who have not met the required 15 hours of activity time will be marked absent accordingly, beginning with the first day of the week.

Students who are maintaining pace according to **Target Due Dates** in all of their courses will be marked present regardless of activity time.

Virtual Student Wellness Checks for Full-time Students

SECTION 1327.4. SCHOOL DISTRICT ENROLLEE WELLNESS CHECKS

This section of the PA School Code mandates that school districts conduct weekly wellness checks for all students enrolled exclusively in full-year virtual instruction programs. The dual purpose of these checks is to verify student well-being and confirm participation in the virtual program. This mandate is effective beginning on July 12, 2026.

1. Core Requirements:

a. Frequency

- i. Once a week (during any school week with at least three instructional days).

b. Method:

- i. The student must be **seen and spoken with in real time** by an authorized school representative (subject to child protective services laws).

c. How to Satisfy the Check:

- i. Virtual weekly meeting with the webcam turned on or an in-person check-in at Alpha. Standardized testing, school field trips, and school-based tutoring (Alpha Extended Hours) will also satisfy this requirement.

2. Exemptions and Adjustments:

a. Excused Absences:

- i. If the student is excused on the day of an attempted check, the district must try again on the next school day or another day that week. If the student is excused for the entire week, they are exempt for that week.

b. Power/Internet Outages:

- i. If the household experiences a documented outage, the check is deferred until the outage is resolved. Parents/Guardians must provide outage documentation as soon as possible.

3. Failure to Complete a Check: Escalation Timeline

If a student misses a weekly wellness check, the district is required to follow this strict timeline:

a. Immediate Outreach

- i. Within 1 school day of the missed check. ParentSquare message sent.

b. Wellness Review Conference:

- i. If no contact within 3 school days of notice, then;
- ii. The district will immediately schedule a Wellness Review Conference within one school day (in person or virtually) to complete the visual check and establish interventions. The district is required to hold this meeting even if the family does not attend.

c. In-Person Wellness Check:

- i. This is required within 24 hours of the missed scheduled conference.
- ii. If the student does not participate in the Wellness Review conference, the district must conduct an in-person wellness check at the student's home or other location.

4. Repetitive Failure to Comply with Weekly Check:

a. Student repeatedly misses weekly wellness checks:

- i. The student will be scheduled for in-person building classes.



Alpha Virtual Student Wellness: Weekly Check-In & Compliance Guide



Under Pennsylvania HB 1505 (Section 1327.4 of the PA School Code), all full-time virtual students must participate in weekly wellness checks to verify their well-being and participation. Alpha implements this through a specific weekly schedule that escalates from digital outreach to in-person home visits if a check is missed.

The Weekly Routine



Friday Morning Wellness Check at 10:00 AM

All full-time Alpha virtual students must join the weekly Wellness Check via Zoom if they have not been seen and heard by Alpha Staff during the week. Joining this Zoom satisfies the requirement of the wellness check for the week.



Live Visual & Verbal Interaction

Students must be seen visually and speak in real-time with school staff.



Alternative Verification Methods

Zoom conferencing with an Alpha instructor or attending Alpha in-person also satisfies the weekly requirement.

Escalation Timeline for Missed Checks



Within 1 Day of Wellness Check:

If the student has not been seen and heard during the week and misses the Friday Zoom Wellness Check, Alpha contacts parents within one school day via *ParentSquare to alert the parent of the missed Wellness Check.



Wednesday: Wellness Review Conference

A mandatory Wellness Review Conference must be held if the student is not seen and heard from within three days of the previous Friday's Wellness Check.



Thursday: In-Person Home Visit

If the Wellness Review Conference is missed, a mandatory home visit by school personnel occurs by the end of the school day on Thursday.

*ParentSquare message will alert the recipient that the student was not seen or heard by Alpha Staff during the previous week and must now arrange an alternate time to be seen and heard prior to 10:00 am on the following Wednesday. This message will also include a time on Wednesday for the Wellness Review Conference if needed.

“Alpha Home” Scheduling

Students with a part-time(hybrid) schedule may choose to adjust one or more of their Alpha course periods to an “Alpha Home” period(s) in their schedule. **This does require parent permission and must not create an open-campus schedule** in which a student leaves school before the end of the day and then returns to school before the end of the day.

During periods labeled “Alpha Home” on a student’s schedule, the student may complete their learning at home. These periods are designed to offer flexibility for families. That said, students are also welcome to be on campus at Alpha during “Alpha Home” periods if they prefer or if additional in-person support is helpful.

For transparency and peace of mind, parents can view when their student signs in and out of the building by logging into Skyward. In the attendance log:

- “1” indicates your student has entered the building.
- “2” indicates your student has left the building.

Regardless of whether students are working from home or on campus during Alpha Home periods, they are expected to maintain their academic pacing and continue making adequate progress in their coursework. Our team monitors progress closely and will reach out if additional support is needed.

Alpha Home: A Guide to Flexible Learning



Flexible Attendance & Tracking

Hybrid Learning Environment



Students may complete learning from home or on-campus during designated Alpha Home periods.

Real-Time Attendance Logs



Parents can monitor building entry and exit through Skyward attendance logs.

Skyward Code 1



Student has entered the building

Skyward Code 2



Student has left the building

Academic Progress & Support

Maintain Academic Pacing



Students must make adequate progress in coursework whether working from home or on-campus.

Proactive Monitoring



The Alpha team monitors progress and provides outreach if additional support is needed.

Enrollment Process

Enrollment Process 2026-2027

Step 1 - Enrollment begins with your school counselor. If you are interested in taking any online course, call your school counselor or make an appointment to see them.

Step 2 - If your school counselor and/or building administrator approves you to take an online course(s), your school counselor will give you a parent permission form.

Step 3 - Return the parent permission form to your school counselor. The school counselor will forward the permission form to the Alpha staff.

Step 4 - After receiving the parent permission form from the guidance office, Alpha staff will contact the parent/student via email to finalize enrollment into online coursework.

Mifflin County High School	717.242.0240
Mifflin County Junior High School	717.248.5441
Mifflin County Middle School	717.242.1401
Alpha	717.447.2655

Extra-curricular Participation

All students are eligible for extracurricular participation, including sports, clubs, and field trips, as long as they meet any other required eligibility guidelines for that activity. More information about extra-curricular activities can be found on each school's website.

Technology

A student laptop and charger can be provided free of charge for the school year to any MCHS student taking an Alpha course, either through the MCHS Guidance Office or the Alpha Staff Office.

Full-time MCJHS and MCMS students can also receive a laptop and charger through Alpha.

A parent must sign for the laptop and charger, and can reach out to the Alpha Staff Office for more information at 717.447.2655.

Transportation

Student transportation to and from Alpha can be provided. AM and PM bus routes, as well as van transportation, are available. For more information or to request van transportation, reach out to the Alpha Staff Office at 717.447.2655

Extended Hours

Alpha holds Extended Hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 pm - 6:00 pm. This is an excellent opportunity to receive one-on-one assistance, take exams, and to work ahead.

Athletic Eligibility

For most students, Alpha courses are self-paced, allowing students to complete work beyond the target due dates without penalty. **However, student-athletes must maintain passing grades in at least 4 subjects by the end of each week to remain eligible under PIAA requirements; therefore, it is the student-athlete's responsibility to meet the target due dates for completing assignments and maintain passing grades each week. We encourage our student-athletes to reach out to their Alpha teachers to confirm their grades prior to Friday each week.**

Alpha Marking Periods

The last day of each alpha marking period is different from the district end dates. Since Alpha coursework is self-paced and students have until each end date to submit all work for that marking period, Alpha teachers need more time to grade student work. The 2026-2027 Alpha Marking Periods are listed below.

MP 1	August 31 - October 27
MP 2	October 28 - January 15
MP 3	January 18 - March 23
MP 4	March 24 - May 28