



Annunciation Catholic School

Middle School Handbook 2026-2027

32648 North Cave Creek Road
Cave Creek, AZ 85331

Dr. Sharon H. Pristash, Principal

Mr. Matt Raiff, Vice Principal

School Office (480) 361-8234

www.acsphx.org

PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to outline policies, procedures, and information specific to the middle school program. It does not cover all policies, procedures, and information affecting middle school students. The complete *Annunciation Catholic School Parent/Student Handbook* should also be referred to by both parents and students.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Middle School Staff Contact Information	2
Teachers	2
Office	2
General Information	3
Middle School Websites	3
Extra-Curricular Activities	3
Student Conduct and Policies	3
Classroom Rules	3
Mass/Adoration/Rosary/Community Prayer Behavior	3
Classroom Consequences for Misbehavior	3
Tardiness and Early Release	3
School Lockers, Desks, and other School Property	3
Students Use and Care of Textbooks and Property	4
Personal Property	4
Student Uniform Policy	4
Cell Phones, Smart Watches, and Electronic Devices	4
Parent-Child Communication	5
Interferences in School	6
Medications	6
Academic Information	6
Core Curriculum	6
Physical Education (PE)	6
Music Education	6
Art Education	7
Technology	7
Student Accounts and Password Security	7
Grading	7
Honor and Merit Awards	8
Homework	8
Academic Dishonesty	8
Plagiarism	8
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	9
Student Attendance	10
Procedures to Follow When a Student is Absent	10
Procedures for Leaving School Prior to 3:00 PM	10
Student Responsibilities	10
Annunciation Middle School Late Work Policy	10
Absences/Make-Up Work	10
Receipt and Acknowledgement	11

Middle School Staff Contact Information

Mrs. Kelly Pope - 6th Grade Home Room Teacher

Email: kpope@acsphx.org

Core curriculum for 6th, 7th, 8th Literature & English

Mrs. Christina Shen - 7th Grade Home Room/Student Council Mentor

Email: cshen@acsphx.org

Core curriculum for 6th, 7th, 8th grade Science

Ms. Lynne O’Keeffe - 8th Grade Home Room/Dean of Students

Email: lokeeffe@acsphx.org

Core curriculum 6th 7th, 8th grade Math

Mrs. Jennie Cullen - Sacrament Preparation

Email: jcullen@acsphx.org

Core curriculum for 6th, 7th, 8th grade Religion & Social Studies

Mrs. Taryn Yaeger - STREAM Coordinator

Email: tyaeger@acsphx.org

Special Education Coordinator

Mrs. Rachel Flemming

Specials

Mrs. Deborah Himmelein - Art

Email: dhimmelein@acsphx.org

Mrs. Liz Trayer- Music Education, private lessons

Email: ltrayer@acsphx.org

Mr. Dave Lauria- Physical Education

Email: dlauria@acsphx.org

Señora Vanessa Ribadeneira– Spanish

Email: vrivadeneira@acsphx.org

School Office

Dr. Sharon Pristash, Principal: spristash@acsphx.org

Mr. Matt Raiff, Vice Principal: mraiff@acsphx.org

Mrs. Lynn Schwartz, Director of Operations and School Facilities: lschwartz@acsphx.org

Mrs. Elizabeth Bravo, Front Office Admin: office@acsphx.org

Mr. Elijah Morford, IT Coordinator: emorford@acsphx.org

Nurses - Mrs. Joann Perraut and Mrs. Stephanie Raiff: nurse@acsphx.org

General Information

Middle School Websites

General information: www.acsphx.org > classrooms > middle school

Grading and assignment information: www.factsmgt.com then parent login

Math: www.bigideasmath.com

IXL math practice: <https://www.ixl.com/signin/annunciation>

Literature: <https://www.hmhco.com/ui/login>

Science: <http://hnhco.com>

English: www.membean.com and www.noredink.com

Social Studies: <https://nglsync.cengage.com/>

Extra-Curricular Activities

There are several opportunities for extra-curricular activities in middle school. Participation in Annunciation's extra-curricular activities is a privilege, thus eligibility to participate is dependent upon academic performance and conduct. Students and parents will be provided information regarding extracurricular activities during the course of the school year.

Student Conduct And Policies

Classroom Rules

The following rules apply to all middle school classes:

RULE #1: RESPECT YOURSELF, OTHERS AND YOUR SCHOOL

RULE #2: CONTRIBUTE TO THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

RULE #3: FOLLOW ALL SCHOOL PROCEDURES

Mass/Adoration/Rosary/Community Prayer Behavior

We expect piety and reverence during all religious experiences. This also includes choir, altar serving, Mass readers, etc.

Classroom Consequences for Misbehavior

The following consequences may be administered for misbehavior in any classroom:

Verbal warnings, email to parents, meeting with the Vice Principal, immediate withdrawal from the classroom. Please read the all-school discipline policy in the *ACS Parent/Student Handbook* for further details. Also, please note that each situation is unique and is handled with the discretion of the adult in charge with everyone's safety in mind.

Tardiness and Early Release

The school day begins at 8:00 AM in the homeroom. If a student walks in at 8:01 they are tardy. Multiple absences and tardies hinder a student's abilities to succeed and reflect poorly when applying to high school.

School Lockers, Desks, and other School Property

Although school lockers, desks, and other facilities and spaces may be temporarily assigned to individual students, they remain the property of the school at all times. The school has a

reasonable and valid interest in ensuring that school property is properly maintained. For this reason, and in order to enforce school rules and maintain discipline, school officials may periodically inspect all, or a randomly selected number of, school lockers, desks, and other facilities and spaces owned by the school. A periodic inspection of a school locker, desk, or other facility or space owned by the school will be conducted only in the presence of the student whose locker is being inspected or in the presence of at least two staff members.

Staff members may ask a student to check students' backpacks, athletic bags, and pockets, within reason, at any time on campus.

Students Use and Care of Textbooks and Property

Students are responsible for the proper care of all books, supplies, and furniture supplied by the school. Students who disfigure property, break chairs, or do other damage to school property or equipment will be required to pay for the damage or replace the item.

Personal Property

The school assumes no responsibility for any personal property that is brought to school. This includes, but is not limited to, phones, calculators, clothing, athletic and computer equipment, etc. Any theft, however, should be reported IMMEDIATELY to the Principal's office.

Student Uniform Policy

See the *ACS Parent/Student Handbook* or ACS website (acsphx.org) for the Uniform Policy.

Cell Phones, Smart Watches, and Electronic Devices

Our personal electronic device policy reflects our commitment to creating an environment where students can develop to their fullest God-given potential, spiritually, intellectually, morally, socially, and physically. Research consistently shows that limiting student access to personal devices during the school day significantly improves attention, learning, classroom engagement, and peer relationships. Our policy is designed to maximize learning while still allowing students to bring a phone to school if deemed necessary by their parent(s)/guardian(s).

Personal Device Defined

Personal devices include, but are not limited to, the following: cell phones of any kind, Smartwatches, headphones or earbuds, personal (not school-issued) laptops, and any non-school-issued personal technology.

Personal Device Policy

Middle school students who bring such devices to school will be required to keep them **powered off and secured in a locked cabinet** in the student's homeroom immediately upon arrival on campus and until dismissal at the end of the school day. Backpacks, lockers or pockets **are not** an acceptable storage location. Random searches of student backpacks, lunchboxes, lockers, and pockets may be conducted by ACS staff (see the **Right to Search** policy in the *ACS Parent/Student Handbook*).

Field Trips

Students are not allowed to take their phones or other devices on field trips.

Parent/guardian drivers are required to enforce this rule in their car. Failure to comply

with this rule will result in loss of chaperone/driver privileges for that parent for the remainder of the year. This applies to all children in the car.

Discipline

If a student violates this policy, a teacher or administrator shall take the following progressively serious disciplinary measures:

1st Offense: The phone/device will be confiscated, and a \$50 fine will be charged. The phone/device will need to be picked up at the school office by a parent.

2nd Offense: The phone/device will be confiscated, and another \$50 fine will be charged. The phone/device will need to be picked up at the school office by a parent.

The student will receive a one-day suspension.

3rd Offense: The phone/device will be confiscated, and a \$100 fine will be charged. The phone/device will need to be picked up at the school office by a parent.

The student will receive a three-day suspension. For the remainder of the school year, the student will not be allowed to bring his/her phone to school.

Parent-School Agreement

A parent or legal guardian of each student will complete an [online form](#) indicating the following question:

___ *My child does not have a cell phone.*

___ *My child will not be bringing his/her phone to school this year.*

___ *My child might bring his/her phone to school occasionally. I understand it will remain in a locked box from 8:00-3:00. If my child breaks this rule, I understand and support the consequences listed in the Cell Phone and Personal Device Policy.*

___ *My child will be bringing his/her phone to school on a regular basis. I understand it will remain in a locked box from 8:00-3:00. If my child breaks this rule, I understand and support the consequences listed in the Cell Phone and Personal Device Policy.*

Parent-Child Communication

As always, parents of ACS students may contact the school office via phone or email to get a message to a child. If a student needs to contact a parent, he/she may do so via the classroom or office phone with staff permission.

Students and parents **may not use email** to communicate during the school day. Students are allowed to use only their school-issued email account during the school day, and only to communicate with members of the school network (faculty, staff, students).

Interferences in School

Students may not possess water guns, toys, lasers and other similar items on school grounds or at school activities. These types of items will be taken away from the students. Fidgets are not allowed on campus unless the staff has granted approval.

Medications

Students may not have any prescription or over-the-counter medications in their possession. The exception to this rule is for sixth graders, seventh graders, and eighth graders, who may carry a prescribed EpiPen or albuterol inhaler. These students must have written permission in the form of an Allergy Action Plan or Asthma Action Plan on file with the office. For more information about medication procedures see the complete *ACS Parent/Student Handbook* or the *Nurses Office* page on the ACS website (acsphx.org).

Academic Information

Core Curriculum

The Core Curriculum consists of Religion, Math, Science, English, Literature, and Social Studies. Courses are based on the Curricular Guidelines for the Diocese of Phoenix, which can be found on the school website under the Academics tab. Technology standards are integrated across the curriculum and embedded in every class.

Physical Education (PE)

Students are separated by grade level for PE class, which meets twice a week. If a child is unable to participate in Physical Education for a medical or health reason, a note from the parent or doctor should be sent to the PE instructor.

On PE days, students are to come to school in their PE uniform. Appropriate clothes for PE include: athletic shoes, ACS athletic shorts and the ACS PE shirt. During colder months, ACS sweatpants or blue or black full-length leggings may be worn underneath the regulation shorts. PE uniforms are purchased through the uniform vendor, Educational Outfitters - see the *ACS Parent/Student Handbook* or ACS website (acsphx.org). Occasionally, used PE uniforms are available for purchase through the ACS office.

The PE grade is based on participation, preparedness, sportsmanship, conduct and effort. If a student does not have a PE uniform for class, the student will not be able to participate and results in a deduction of points.

Music Education

Research has found that learning music facilitates learning in other subjects and enhances skills that children inevitably use in other areas. Music helps to develop spatial intelligence - particularly spatial-temporal skills - which allows students to visualize how elements fit together,

which is required in solving math problems. Music education is also found to support language development as music supports the development of the left side of the brain, which also processes language.

For that reason, music education is a required component of the middle school curriculum. Students are separated by grade level for music class, which meets once a week. Students are given ample opportunities to perform both vocally and on instruments. The music grade is based on participation, preparedness, willingness to perform, conduct, and effort.

Art Education

Numerous studies over the past decade have demonstrated the amazing benefits of such an integral education facet. Students who don't have access to art classes may not only miss out on a key creative outlet, but might also face greater difficulty mastering core subjects, higher dropout rates, and more disciplinary problems. For that reason, art education is a required component in the middle school curriculum.

Students are separated by grade level for art class, which meets once a week. Students are given ample opportunities to display their visual art and enter art competitions. The art grade is based on participation, preparedness, proper use of materials, conduct and effort.

Technology

MS students are each assigned a chromebook for their use during the school year. Students may use only the device assigned to them. Students may not touch or use a personal or school assigned device that belongs to another student. Closing someone else's Chromebook is unacceptable. For more information regarding the use of technology and the consequences of misbehavior, please see the *Technology Acceptable Use Agreement for Student/Parent* in the *ACS Parent/Student Handbook*.

Student Accounts and Passwords

Students are required to create a unique password when they begin middle school and update it as needed thereafter. The password they create will be used to access the following applications:

- Student Chromebook
- Google Suite
- FACTS
- Textbook software (HMH Ed)
- IXL

Grading

Students receive progress reports in the form of report cards at the end of each trimester. **All gradebooks are online and available for parents anytime at FACTS factsmgt.com (formally RenWeb).** Please email the class teacher for any questions pertaining to online grades. All teachers recommend students keep any graded work until the next report card in case of input errors in online gradebook. If you or your child believe a grade was incorrectly recorded, contact the teacher directly.

Honor and Merit Awards

Honor and Merit Awards are presented to middle school students at the annual awards ceremony on the last day of school. Grades for all subjects are used to determine eligibility.

Saint Edith Stein Merit Roll Award

The Merit Award is earned by students with a cumulative grade average of 92% - 95%.

Saint Thomas Aquinas Honor Roll Award

The Honor Award is earned by students with a cumulative grade average of 96% or higher.

Homework

Teachers assign homework, extra class activities, or assignments as necessary in support of the topics being covered. Homework reinforces classroom learning, develops responsibility, and helps students build independent study habits needed for high school and beyond. Students are expected to complete homework within the time given.

Homework is an integral part of the learning process, as it encourages students to begin accepting responsibility for managing time and quality of work. Parents/Guardians should encourage their children to develop good study skills while doing their homework.

The middle school faculty strives to keep nightly homework to approximately 60 minutes or less, recognizing that individual students may require different amounts of time depending on their subject understanding and recent attendance. If a parent/guardian thinks his/her child is spending an unusual amount of time on homework each night, they should contact the teacher(s).

Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to do their own schoolwork. Cheating by looking at another student's schoolwork, copying another student's work, using unapproved resources, allowing or encouraging a classmate to copy your work, or similar cheating is not tolerated. Students caught cheating will receive an automatic referral to the Dean of Students. The assignment will be recorded as a zero.

Plagiarism

Definition: Plagiarism is the passing off of the thoughts or works of another as one's own. Plagiarism involves giving the impression that a person has thought, written, or produced something that has, in fact, been borrowed from another. There are two basic forms of plagiarism:

1. Using someone else's work as your own, without citing the source. This includes direct copying, rephrasing, and summarizing, as well as taking someone else's idea and putting it in different words.
2. Not indicating directly quoted passages or ideas even while citing the work as a general source.

Penalties: Each case shall be treated individually. Minor first infringements may be corrected by counseling or by the imposition of a penalty, as appropriate. Depending on the circumstances, the penalty imposed may include a warning, resubmission, loss of marks, failure on a particular task or in a subject, or a charge of misconduct to be dealt with by the principal/Dean of Students. Where a penalty is imposed, the parents/guardian will be notified and a written note will be placed in the student's file. Before imposing a penalty for plagiarism, the student's file should be checked to determine whether the offense is a first or subsequent offense. For a subsequent offense, the penalty will be more severe.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

“In the era of artificial intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human.”

Pope Leo XIV

Magnifica Humanitas, no. 15

Artificial intelligence (AI) can be a powerful learning tool in an academic environment. However, it must be used to support student thought instead of replacing it. AI chatbots, including but not limited to ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, Grammarly AI, and similar applications, may be used only with the permission and direction of the classroom teacher. Students are expected to submit work that reflects their own thinking, understanding, and effort.

Unless specifically authorized by the teacher, students may not use AI tools to:

- Complete assignments or assessments
- Generate essays, reports, or written responses
- Solve math problems or provide answers to graded work
- Create projects intended to demonstrate the student's own knowledge or skills

When a teacher permits AI use for a particular assignment, students must:

- Follow the teacher's specific instructions
- Acknowledge the use of AI when required
- Verify the accuracy of any information provided by the AI tool
- Remain responsible for all submitted work

Using AI inappropriately, or turning in work created by AI as your own, is considered academic dishonesty and is subject to the school's Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism policies.

Technology, including AI, should be used as a tool to support learning—not as a substitute for the effort expected of every ACS student.

Student Attendance

Procedures to Follow When a Student will be Absent

If a student is going to be absent, parents should call the office (480-361-8234) or email the office (office@acsphx.org) prior to 8:00 AM.

Procedures for Leaving School Prior to 3:00 PM (12:00 PM on Half Days)

1. A parent/guardian should notify the school office in advance of the pick up time.
2. A parent/guardian must sign out the student at the front desk, and the student will be sent to the office.
3. Students are responsible for all missed work.

Student Responsibilities

Students are responsible for checking FACTS and communicating with teachers after returning from an absence.

Class attendance is mandatory. Unauthorized absence from classes or other designated areas will not be permitted and are subject to disciplinary action as deemed appropriate by the Principal or Vice Principal.

Late Work Policy

Assignments turned in one day late will receive a 20% deduction of the assignment's total points. Work turned in 2 or more days late will result in a 50% deduction.

Absences/Make-Up Work

A. Unanticipated absence is an absence that cannot be anticipated by a student or parent. Some examples are illness, death in family, serious illness, or emergency situation.

1. When an absence occurs, all schoolwork missed is the student's responsibility to collect the day they return. The students are allotted one school day to make up work per day absent. The late work policy will be in effect if make-up work is not completed in the allotted days.

- a. For example, if a student is absent on Tuesday and returns on Wednesday, his/her absent work is due on Thursday.
- b. If a student is absent on Monday and Tuesday and returns on Wednesday, then all absent work is due on Friday.
- c. **If the student is present the day an assignment was given, but absent the day the assignment is due, the student is responsible for turning it in on the first day he/she returns to class.**

2. In case of an absence of more than five (5) days, students must make arrangements with each teacher to complete assignments.

B. Anticipated absence is an absence that a student and a parent know in advance will occur. These absences include medical appointments, court appointments, vacations, family trips, etc. Students are expected to check in on Google Classroom and complete assignments as they are able during their planned absence.

RECEIPT AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT
ACS MIDDLE SCHOOL HANDBOOK
2026-2027

*I have received and read a copy of the ACS Middle School Handbook.
I agree to abide by all rules outlined within this handbook.*

Signature of parent(s)/guardian(s) _____

Signature of student _____

Date _____

Signature of student _____

Date _____

Signature of student _____

Date _____

*** Please remove this page and return it to school within one week of receiving it.
Thank you!*