



BRILLA COLLEGE PREP
Middle School

Brilla College Prep
Middle School
Family Handbook
2019 - 2020

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Letter to Families

Dear Families,

Welcome to Brilla College Prep Middle School!

Please take the time to read through our entire handbook. We encourage you to read pertinent portions before the beginning of the school year and when necessary. The following pages clarify many of the essential details that a family must understand to participate fully in our school community. Understanding the handbook helps your family join the larger Brilla Network family, as we share common values and expectations.

The center of our school is the classroom and the relationship between the teachers and the scholars. Yet, the community is incomplete if the partnership between the school and the family stops at the classroom doors. As such, I urge every family member and student to become immersed in the culture of the school by joining the Family Involvement Committee or volunteering in the homerooms. Through dedicated work and commitment, we can continue to build each other's spirits and our school community!

As a founding school, much of what we do lays the foundation for the many years to come. It is said that it takes a village to raise a child. Each of us plays an important role in creating the village that will be required to prepare our children for excellence in high school, college and beyond. Let's have a strong year and strive to make our school the best it can be.

Warmest regards,

Matthew Larsen
Founding Principal



Our Mission

Brilla College Prep Middle School (“Brilla Middle”) is a school in the Brilla Charter Schools network. The mission is as follows:

Brilla Public Charter Schools, K-8 schools in the classical tradition, help students to grow intellectually, socially and physically, into young men and women, of good character and spirit, and to be prepared for excellence in high school, college and beyond.

Through the application of proven strategies and strategic partnerships, our school will provide a well- rounded liberal arts education. We believe that graduation from college is an important foundation for a successful life. By developing scholars’ reflective thinking abilities and virtues of good character, we will equip them with the fundamental tools to construct a better future for themselves and for the world around them. Scholars will gain confidence in their knowledge and will be able to ask meaningful questions of themselves and of others. Their ability to reason and solve problems will extend beyond school walls and carry them through life.

Hours of Operation

Getting to school on time is a key to each child’s success – at school and in life. At Brilla Middle, the learning begins from the moment scholars walk in the door. Late scholars miss valuable learning time and tardiness, in general, is a bad habit. One of the most common reasons that people lose their jobs is persistent tardiness.



Brilla Middle operates from 7:45 A.M. until 4:00 P.M., Monday through Thursday. School is dismissed at 1:15 P.M. on Fridays. Scholars are required to arrive at school on time (by 8:00 A.M. at the latest) and to remain in school until dismissal at 4:00 P.M. (1:15 P.M. on Fridays). By arriving to school each day on time, you send a strong message to your child that school is extremely important.

We will have an optional faith-based after school program, El Camino that will run from 4:00 P.M. to 5:30 P.M. Monday through Thursday and a partnership program with Kids In The Game (KING) from 1:15 to 5:30 PM on Fridays.

- **Arrival:** Scholars must be dropped off at school between 7:45 A.M. and 8:00 A.M.
 - Scholars arriving at or after 8:00 A.M. are considered late and tardiness will be recorded.
 - Since it is the parents' responsibility to transport the child to school, any student whose tardiness begins to significantly interfere with instruction will be required to have a formal meeting with Administration, and the incident will be recorded in the student's file.

- **Dismissal:** Dismissal is at 4:00 P.M. Mon-Thurs and 1:15 P.M. on Friday.
 - All scholars not attending an after school program must be picked up within a 15 minute window. The doors will close promptly at 4:15 P.M. Monday-Thursday and 1:30 P.M. Friday.
 - Families arriving after this time will have a late pick-up recorded in the main office.



- Parents that need to pick up their child early may do so prior to 3:30 P.M.
- **Parents will not be able to pick up their child between 3:30 P.M. and 4:00 P.M. so as to maintain safety while scholars are dismissing from their classrooms.**
- Any family who incurs more than 5 late pick ups or early pickups in a trimester will be required to have a formal meeting with Administration, and the incident will be recorded in the student's file.

Attendance

Attendance at school is the most basic requirement for learning. In order for scholars to achieve their personal best, they must be present and make their strongest effort during school each and every day. At Brilla Middle regular attendance is required, and poor attendance will not be tolerated. Our curriculum is an ambitious one; every day is essential for scholars to keep pace. Parents are expected to ensure that their child is in school. PLEASE, do not allow your child to miss a day of school except for serious illnesses. Excessive absences will be considered a violation of the Commitment to Excellence that you signed during your Home Visit.

- ***“Excused” vs. “Unexcused”***: We do not distinguish between “excused” and “unexcused” absences. While we understand that life happens (sickness, weddings, funerals, etc.), we also hold firmly to the belief that missing school is a missed learning opportunity, and thus all absences will be treated the same. If your child has ten or more days of absences for the year it may affect their ability to be promoted to the next grade. Brilla has already released our school year calendar, so please plan accordingly.



- ***Never Miss School for Appointments:*** Parents/guardians are responsible for scheduling medical appointments outside of school time. The best times are Friday afternoons (after 1:15 P.M.) or when school is not in session. In the rare case that a student has a medical appointment at a time when school is in session, he or she should not be absent for the entire school day.
- ***Suspensions Are Considered Absences:*** Suspensions are extremely rare at Brilla Middle. If a student is absent from school due to suspension, however, these days will be treated the same as an absence.
- ***Early Dismissal:*** Scholars are expected to stay in school until the very end of the day (4:00 P.M. Monday - Thursday and 1:15 P.M. on Fridays). Early pickups are disruptive to the learning environment. We are intently focused on educating our scholars and will not release scholars prior to the end of the school day without prior notification.

Attendance – Consequences for Absences

- ***No Absences in a trimester:*** The student and parent/guardian are congratulated and recognized for exceptional attendance and commitment to their education during the Perfect Attendance breakfast.
- ***Five Absences in a Trimester:*** If a student is absent five times in a trimester, it is considered a serious issue. At this point, the teacher or Grade Level Chair will contact the parent/guardian.
- ***Ten Absences in a Year:*** If a student is absent ten times in a year, the student is considered unprepared and is **at risk of not being promoted to the next grade.** The



Principal will contact the parent/guardian and reserves the right to retain any student who misses more than 10 days of school. In addition, a report may be filed with the appropriate child services agency.

- ***Twenty Absences in a Year:*** If a student is absent twenty times in a year, the student will be considered extremely at risk. The Principal and Social Worker will work closely with families with more than 10 absences. The school administration may file a written complaint with a relevant court or child services agency.

Homework

Homework is an essential part of the Brilla Middle educational program: it is designed to reinforce skills taught in the classroom, to help scholars develop a deeper understanding of concepts, and to promote good study habits. Homework will be assigned every night at Brilla Middle. It will include at least 30 minutes of required reading nightly (including most weekends and holidays). Homework must be completed in full and in accordance with Brilla Middle's high standards for hard work and professional presentation.

Homework binders will be provided to all scholars. Homework binders are designed to teach scholars essential organizational skills. There are high standards for homework since it is a key ingredient to our scholars' success.

Homework Procedures:

Scholars will be provided with homework packets each week on Monday, one packet for each subject (5th/6th grade). Scholars are required to complete their homework daily and read for 30 minutes each night. Scholars will submit their complete homework each day in class.



Teachers will score each night's homework packet according to the following scale:

- 2: complete and accurate
- 1: some work completed incorrectly (or incomplete); student should re-do the assignment(s) and submit by the end of the week
- 0: totally incomplete

Homework packets will be collected for final scoring on Friday morning. Scholars will receive separate Cardinal Challenge work for the weekend, due Monday morning. The Cardinal Challenge is optional and will not be assigned every weekend. It will align with school initiatives and events. More extensive homework packets will be assigned for week long breaks. Any work assigned will be scored toward their homework grade. It is the student's responsibility to retrieve a homework packet if they were absent.

Independent Reading

Research shows that the number one way to improve a student's reading skills is to have them read as often as possible. The scholars who read the most outside of school are the scholars who are the best readers and who score highest on reading tests. **Supporting your child's independent reading at home is the #1 way to help him or her improve on their speed, accuracy, and vocabulary comprehension of his or her reading.** Although Brilla Middle scholars have high-quality reading time during school, they must read at home every night, every weekend and during any breaks from school.

Parents/guardians should make sure to supervise their child in reading at least 30 minutes every night and every day on the weekends.



Make-Up Work

After returning from an absence, scholars are expected to complete any missed assignments. The parent must help the student check on missed assignments, and any missed work must be completed.

In the event of a planned absence (one that you know about in advance), parents/guardians should notify teachers several days in advance so that they can prepare a packet of work for scholars to complete during the absence. Again, absences from school directly hurt a child's academic progress. A child should only be absent in the case of serious illness or real family emergency.

Communication and Academic Partnership

Brilla Middle requires parents to be partners in the education of their children. The important task of educating a child calls for the school, the student, and the parents/guardians to all work together to ensure success. *See the Brilla Commitment to Excellence (attached as Appendix A).*

In order to be effective partners, we must communicate. There are several ways that we can and will communicate with you throughout the year:

- **Parent Communication:** Monthly, each family will receive a Brilla Newsletter, Monthly Event Calendar, and School Foods Calendar. There may be other fliers sent home periodically. All fliers will be printed on colored paper to make them easily distinguishable in the homework binder. High interest fliers will be printed in color ink. Families will also sign up for a communication service: ClassTag.



- **Report Card Conferences:** At the end of each trimester (excluding trimester 3), parents will be required to come to the school for Report Card conferences with their child's advisory teacher. Students will lead the report card conference and show a portfolio of student work, as well as share established goals. Parents will receive a written Report Card at this conference. These are very important opportunities for parents to learn about their child's progress and needs. **Report Card conferences are mandatory.**
- **Behavior Alert / Academic Alert:** If your child is experiencing a problem, the school may send home a written notice. Parents should make sure to review the concerns outlined in the letter with the child and to contact the school if there are any questions.
- **Phone Calls:** Throughout the year, you may receive a phone call or note from a teacher or school administrator. If the message requires a response, please contact the school either by phone or in writing within 24 hours.
- **Meetings:** If the school requests a meeting with you and your child, we need to discuss something important with you. If you would like to schedule a meeting with a teacher or administrator, please contact them directly.
- **Visits:** To arrange a visit to the school, please see the section on *School Visitor Policy*.
- **Parent Concerns:** If you have a concern about a school policy, academic grade, discipline decision, or anything else, we ask that you take some time to reflect on it. If you are still concerned after a day or two has passed, please contact the school. We welcome the conversation. We understand that, as parents, you have very strong feelings about issues concerning your child. We ask only that you attempt to address any issue professionally and respectfully. We promise to treat you and your concern with respect.



We need your support. As you know, Brilla Middle is a very demanding school, with high expectations for academics and behavior. All of us – parents, teachers, and administrators – are working hard to help your child gain all the knowledge to get to college. We are all part of your child’s team: if you and your child work with us, we can all succeed.

Promotion to the Next Grade

In order to be promoted to the next grade level, scholars must meet the minimum grade level promotion standards for their current grade level. Any scholars that have not met the minimum exit standards will have their academic records reviewed by School administrators. If a student is being considered for grade-level retention, his/her homeroom teacher must assist in the creation of an individualized plan that specifies the necessary changes to ensure that the student benefits from repeating a grade level. We owe it to the child to develop a plan that holds us accountable to modifying our approach. The child may be promoted if significant growth has been made from the previous year, or if administrators do not feel that retention is in the best interest of the child. These scholars will automatically be recommended for additional intervention and support services for the following academic year. The staff will meet with the child’s parents/guardians to discuss the promotion decision and any additional strategies for supporting the child at home.

Criteria for Promotion:

- Performance at or above grade level in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies.



- Attendance: If a child is absent more than 10 times, chances are he or she will NOT be promoted.
- Homework: If homework is incomplete, it shows that the child is not ready to move on to more challenging work.
- Behavior: If child is socially and behaviorally under developing, it may mean that the child is not prepared to move on with their peers.

Evaluations and Special Education Services

The Student Services team at Brilla Middle will evaluate all student IEPs and help develop the metrics that will be used to determine if the scholars are reaching the goals written in their IEPs. At Brilla, we take Special Education very seriously and will work directly with the parents/guardians to make sure that all parties are fully aware of the extent of the goals and requirements for a student with an IEP. Scholars who have IEPs will be promoted to the next grade based on successful completion of the goals of the IEP. Scholars with IEPs who have significant attendance or behavioral problems unrelated to their IEPs may be retained for these reasons.

Behavior Code and Discipline

As a school, we do not believe in the systems approach to discipline. We believe that students learn to be independent thinkers and problem solvers when there are logical consequences for actions; there should not be consequences already in place. Our system is based on the theory that scholars can solve their own problems and that each student is unique in what



consequences work for what actions. Our system, Love and Logic, relies on certain core beliefs about actions and consequences.

Some core beliefs for using Love and Logic include the following:

- Maintain dignity for the adult and child.
- Whenever possible, share the control.
- Whenever possible, share the thinking – get the child to do more.
- If consequences are necessary, use the empathy-with-consequences approach.
- Families will get a full tutorial and training on what Love and Logic is all about and how you can roll it out at home.

Lost and Found

The school will keep a small lost and found box in the main office. Parents may come in any day between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to search the Lost and Found. At the end of every trimester, items left in the box may be donated to a local charity.

Messages / Voicemail

It would take an incredible amount of staffing and resources to provide message services, **and we cannot guarantee that messages will actually reach scholars or teachers during the day.**

Scholars and teachers may not receive incoming phone calls or messages unless it is an emergency that requires immediate attention. Such calls should be very rare.

If you need to get a message to your child's teacher, please check the distributed homework sheet and call the teacher on his/her cell phone number provided. We all check voicemail at



least once a day and are committed to returning calls within 24 hours.

Nursing Services & Medication

Nursing services for Brilla Middle are provided by the Department of Health. We recommend, however, that parents have a doctor or health center look into any recurring health problem a child is having.

The nurse is responsible for checking all health records to be certain that each student is properly immunized. Brilla Middle is required by law to have a completed health form on file for every student within 14 days of a child attending our school. The health form documents the vaccinations that a child has received to date. If you have not received this form from the school, please contact the school's Director of Operations immediately.

If your child requires medication during school hours, please contact the school's Director of Operations to request a Medical Administration Form (or MAF). The building nurse has the training and resources to store and administer medication. However, medication cannot be administered to your child until your child's physician has completed the form. This is a requirement of the Health Department and pertains to all medicine, including aspirin, Tylenol, and other over-the-counter medicines. The building nurse will keep a detailed log of all medicines that are administered.

Transportation

Brilla Middle will be located at 500 Courtlandt Avenue in the South Bronx. The area is accessible by an extensive public transportation network. The school will be located three blocks from the



2 and 5 subway lines that stop at the 3rd Avenue/149th Street Station. It is also accessible by numerous MTA buses, including the BX2, 15, 19, 21, 41 and 55. We expect many of our scholars to live in the surrounding neighborhood and walk to school.

We recognize that charter schools are considered non-public schools for the purpose of receiving transportation services under Education Law §2853(4)(b). The NYC DOE is responsible for providing the same transportation services as other NYC public school scholars, and Brilla Middle will coordinate with the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) to access Metro Cards. Special education scholars will receive transportation as mandated in their IEPs; the school will work closely with the CSE to ensure that if appropriate transportation is required it is provided. The families of scholars who do not qualify for busing services or a full or half-fare Metrocard will be responsible for arranging their child's transportation to and from Brilla Middle.

School Calendar & Closings

Brilla Middle will only close school in cases of extreme weather conditions. In such situations, we will follow the NYC Department of Education closings. Please listen to local radio and television stations. If New York City announces a delayed opening or a closing, Brilla Middle will follow accordingly.

School Lunch Program

Both breakfast and lunch will be available at Brilla Middle. As part of its participation in the School Nutrition Program (a federal program that subsidizes student meals), the school must collect completed lunch application forms for all its scholars. The lunch application form is used to determine the level of assistance that a child will receive.



Parents may send lunch to school. If you are sending lunch to school with your child, we ask that you send in nutritious foods. Please do not let your child bring unhealthy drinks (e.g., sodas or juices heavy in sugar) or unhealthy snacks (snacks high in fat, calories, or sugar) to school. Foods that are high in sugar content cause scholars to become very hyper and then lose energy and feel very sluggish. We encourage you to pack healthy snacks (such as fruit) instead of candy or soda. The school reserves the right not to allow scholars to consume unhealthy food and drinks at school. Unhealthy foods may be confiscated and will NOT be returned.

School Visitor Policy

Visitors, especially parents, are a vital part of the Brilla Middle community. We welcome them as volunteers, observers, and partners in the education of our scholars. **Parents who would like to visit should contact the classroom teachers to make arrangements. Upon arriving, all visitors must sign in within the Main Office.**

If a visitor is coming to school to drop something off for a student or to leave a message, we still require that the visitor come first to the Main Office. For the sake of student safety, we cannot allow unannounced visitors to roam the building.

Student Records

The school administration is responsible for all student records. They will discuss, explain, and/or make available to an eligible student (18 years old or greater) or parents/guardians any records on file. If a parent would like to examine a child's record, the parent should submit a request in writing to the Head of School or the Director of Operations. Within 10 days, the eligible student or parent will be allowed to inspect the file and may request a copy of some or all of the information contained in the record.



Please see Appendix C for a more information about the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

School Uniforms

All scholars must come to school in the Brilla Middle uniform every day. If a student arrives to school out of uniform, parents will be called and asked to bring in a uniform before the student is sent to class. *Scholars may not change out of the Brilla Middle uniform at any point during the school day.* We have a required school uniform for several very important reasons:

- 1) **Uniforms unite us as a community.** When you look at the Brilla Middle shirts, it is a powerful visual statement of our community. Scholars make a commitment that when they put on the Brilla Middle uniform; they are agreeing to live up to the school's values.
- 2) **Uniforms reduce distractions and clothing competition.** Often scholars spend more time discussing and evaluating what others are wearing, or not wearing, than they spend focusing on learning. Wearing uniforms eliminates this distraction.
- 3) **Uniforms make us all equal.** Whether families have high incomes or low incomes, the scholars come to school looking the same way. No one is made to feel bad about the clothes they have or don't have.
- 4) **Uniforms look professional.** Scholars look neat when they arrive to school with shirts tucked into their pants. The scholars come mentally prepared for school and "dressed for work."

General Uniform Requirements:

Uniform checks occur during Scholar Arrival, Morning Routines (teacher records infractions), and before transitions for the following requirements:



- **Boys:** rubber-soled, ALL-BLACK shoes, black socks, gray pants, uniform shirt, and black belts (for non- elastic pants).
- **Girls:** rubber-soled, ALL-BLACK shoes, black socks or tights/leggings, gray pants or skirt, and uniform shirt.
- Uniform shirts must always be tucked in; white undershirts may be worn underneath the uniform shirt. Black Brilla Middle cardigans sweaters are optional.
- Jewelry is limited to one item each (one necklace, bracelet, ring, pair of earrings).

If uniform non-compliance becomes a chronic problem, the family will be called in for a formal meeting, and the incident will be recorded in the scholar's file. Families will be contacted immediately for egregious infractions; uniform will be adjusted as soon as possible.

Exceptions:

- On Fridays, scholars may wear Brilla shirts or college t-shirts (tucked-in) in place of their polos.



Complaint Policy

When misunderstandings or disputes arise in the school community, it is important that they be resolved before serious problems develop. Faculty, staff, and other members of the school community should always try to resolve their difficulties among themselves first. Informal consultation with the Principal is encouraged if efforts among parties involved are not fruitful. When this is not sufficient to resolve an issue, Brilla has adopted a policy for informal and formal complaints. For a copy of the complete policy come to the main office. *Please see Appendix E for copy of the formal complaint form.*

Human Services

Below are several emergency telephone numbers that may be useful to parents/guardians and scholars:

- Child Abuse Care Line
- Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-872-2288
- Drug Dependence Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE
- Mental Health Hotline: 1-800-LIFENET
- Police/Fire Emergency NYC: 911
- Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222
- Rape Crisis Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE
- Runaway Hotline: 1-888-83R-OOTS
- Suicide Prevention: 1-800-273-TALK

