



**Brilla Schools
Elementary
Family Handbook
2019-2020**

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The Mission of Our Schools

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, Brilla Public Charter Schools provide a well-rounded liberal arts education. Brilla believes that graduation from college is an important foundation for a successful life. By developing students' reflective and critical thinking skills, and positive character traits, Brilla equips each student with the fundamental tools to construct a better future for themselves and for the world around them. Brilla students gain confidence in their knowledge and are able to ask meaningful questions, and engage in purposeful discourse. Their ability to reason and solve problems extends beyond school walls and carries them through life.

Attendance - General

Attendance at school is the most basic requirement for learning. In order for students to reach their personal best, they must be on time and present, and make their strongest effort at school each and every day. **At Brilla, consistent and timely attendance is required, and poor attendance will not be tolerated.**

Brilla's curriculum is rigorous and ambitious. As such, every day is essential for students to keep pace. Parents/guardians are expected to ensure their child is in school. Scholars are expected to be at school every single day except in the case of serious illnesses. Excessive absences are considered a violation of the Commitment to Excellence that each family signs during their Home Visit meetings.

- ***"Excused" versus "Unexcused"*** – Brilla does not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. While it is understood that life events occur (sickness, weddings, funerals, etc.), Brilla also holds firmly to the belief that missing school results in missed learning, and thus all absences will be treated the same. If students have ten or more days of absences for the year it may affect their ability to be promoted to the next grade. Brilla releases its school calendar prior to each school year so families can plan accordingly.
- ***Never miss school for appointments*** – Parents/guardians are responsible for scheduling medical appointments outside of school hours. Preferable appointment times are Friday afternoons (after 1:00 P.M.) or during school closures. 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, but rather attend school before and/or after the appointment.

- **Suspensions are considered absences** – If a student is absent from school due to suspension, each day of suspension is treated the same as an absence.
- **Early dismissal** – Students are expected to stay in school until the very end of the day (3:45 P.M. Monday - Thursday and 1:00 P.M. on Fridays). The learning environment is disrupted when students are picked up early. As such, Brilla will not release students prior to the end of the school day without prior notification.

Attendance – Consequences for Absences

- **No absences in a quarter:** Students and parents/guardians are congratulated and recognized for exceptional attendance and commitment to their education during the quarterly Perfect Attendance Breakfast.
- **Five absences in a quarter:** If a student is absent five times in a quarter, it is considered a serious problem, and a violation of the Commitment to Excellence. **At this point, the teacher or Grade Level Lead 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 school counselor or a member of the administration will contact the parent/guardian.** The Principal reserves the right to retain any student who misses more than ten 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 is considered extremely at risk. The school administration may file a written complaint with a relevant court or child services agency.

Attendance – Arrival/Dismissal

Timeliness is essential to each child’s success – at school and in life. At Brilla, core instruction and learning begins from the moment students walk in the door until the moment they leave.

When students arrive late, they miss valuable learning time and tardiness in general is a bad habit. One of the most common reasons that people lose their job is persistent tardiness. As such, reinforcing timeliness from a young age is critical.

- **Arrival:** Students must be dropped off at school between 7:30 A.M. and 7:45 A.M.
- Students arriving after 7:45 A.M. are considered late and tardiness is recorded

- on these students' files.
- Since it is the parents'/guardians' responsibility to transport the child to school, any family whose tardiness becomes a pattern and begins to significantly interfere with instruction is required to have a formal meeting with the administration, and the incident will be recorded in the student's file.
- **Dismissal:** Dismissal is at 3:45 P.M. Mon-Thurs and 1:00 P.M. on Friday.
 - All students not attending an after school program must be picked up within a 15 minute window. The doors close promptly at 4:00 P.M. Monday-Thursday and 1:15 P.M. Friday. Late pick-ups are recorded on students' files.
 - In the case of emergency, parents/guardians that need to pick up their child early may notify the office and teacher in advance, and must retrieve their child prior to 3:30 P.M. **Parents/guardians may not be able to pick up their child between 3:30 P.M. and 3:45 P.M. so as to maintain safety while students are transitioning from their classrooms to dismissal.**
 - If late pick-ups become a pattern and/or a family accrues more than five late pick ups in a quarter, the parent/guardian will be required to have a formal meeting with the administration, and the incident will be recorded in the student's file. Additionally the school may need to take action accordingly filing a written complaint with a relevant court or child services agency.

BrightWork

Homework, known as BrightWork at Brilla, is an essential part of the educational program: it is designed to reinforce skills taught in the classroom, to help students develop a deeper understanding of concepts, and to promote good study habits. BrightWork is assigned every night across all grades. BrightWork includes at least 20-30 minutes of required reading nightly (including most weekends and holidays), for which a parent/guardian signature is required on the reading log. BrightWork must be completed in full and in accordance with Brilla's high standards for hard work, attention to detail and precision, and overall professional presentation.

All students are provided with BrightWork Folders that include a nightly Reading Log. BrightWork Folders are designed to teach students essential organizational skills. **Reading Logs must be filled out properly with a parent/guardian signature, and all assigned homework must be completed and in the folder.** There are high standards for BrightWork since homework is a key ingredient to scholars' success.

BrightWork Procedures:

- Scholars will be provided with BrightWork packets each week
- Scholars are required to complete their BrightWork daily and read for 20 minutes each night (evidenced by a family member's signature on the Reading Log)
- Scholars submit their complete BrightWork folder daily

- BrightWork folders are returned prior to dismissal each day
- BrightWork packets are collected for final scoring on Friday mornings
- Teachers score each BrightWork packet according to the following scale:
 - ✓ Good work!
 - X Some work completed (incomplete/incorrect); student should re-do the assignment(s) and submit by the end of the week
 - O (Circle) Did not attempt/no effort; student should re-do the assignment(s) and submit by the end of the week
- Scholars receive separate Family Challenge work for the weekends, due Monday morning

More extensive BrightWork packets are assigned for extended breaks. These BrightWork packets are distributed on the day leading up to extended breaks, and also posted under the Parent Resources page on BrillaSchools.org

Extra copies of the week's BrightWork are also available in the Main Office after Monday afternoon.

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. There is a high correlation between students who read regularly outside of school, and those who score highest on reading exams. **The more students read, the more likely they are to succeed in school and in life. Supporting students' independent reading at home is the most important way to help them improve their speed, accuracy, vocabulary, comprehension, and overall reading ability.** Although Brilla students have high-quality reading time during the school day, they must read at home every night for at least 20 minutes, every weekend, and during any vacation from school to ensure they are building their stamina and reading skills at the same rate as their peers. Families can support students' reading by asking them to read aloud, by stopping them occasionally and asking questions about what they are reading. This dialogue around reading encourages and enhances students' comprehension and love of reading.

Please do not sign your child's independent reading log if you have not actually seen him or her read. Students may be tempted to cut corners; however, skipping this important reading requirement only hurts students' achievement in the long run.

Make-Up Work

After returning from an absence, students are expected to complete any missed assignments. The parent/guardian must help the student check missed assignments, and ensure all missed work is completed.

In the rare event of a planned absence (one that is known in advance), parents/guardians are required to notify teachers and the school administration at least two weeks prior to allow time for work packets and anticipated missed work to be compiled. From there, students are expected to complete the work during their absence, and the parent/guardian is ultimately responsible for ensuring quality, completion, and effectiveness of the student's work product. Again, absences from school have a direct, negative impact on a child's academic progress, and should be avoided at all costs. A student should only be absent in the case of serious illness or a family emergency.

Student Technology Policy

**** This policy applies to all electronic devices (i.e. cell phones, iPods, iPads, MP3 players, personal laptop computers, etc.) ****

The Brilla student technology policy allows the *possession* of telecommunications devices by students on campus during the regular school day, but not the use of such devices. The policy also states that telecommunication devices may not be kept on the student's person. This means that the device must be kept in a bookbag, and remain in the off position for the duration of the school day.

During the school day (defined as being from the time a student arrives on campus each morning until school is dismissed for the day with an authorized adult), these devices must be turned off and may not be used by students. These devices enable potential distraction to students and the overall learning environment, and can compromise the integrity of students' learning and peer to peer interactions. The possession of cell phones by students on campus also poses a risk with regards to bullying behaviors.

There is no reason that a student should need to use a cell phone during the regular school day. In any instance requiring emergency communication with a student or with a parent/guardian, the school will immediately assist the student, parent/guardian, or other authorized adult with the necessary communication via a school telephone.

If a student is found to be in violation of the Student Technology Policy, school personnel will confiscate the device. Refusal by a student to surrender the device is not an option. Devices confiscated may be picked up by the parent/guardian from the teacher or staff member who confiscated the device. If a part-time employee (i.e. related service providers – paraprofessional, speech therapist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, etc.) confiscates a device, it may be picked up from the student's homeroom teacher or from the main office. Brilla reserves the right to search the contents of any devices that have been confiscated. Finally, should any device be lost, stolen, or damaged at school, Brilla is not responsible, and will not assume responsibility for damages, repairs, or replacements.

Communication

Brilla requires parents/guardians to be partners in the education of their children. The important task of educating a child and ensuring each child's success in school and in life calls for the school, the student, and the parents/guardians to work together in partnership. ***See the Brilla Commitment to Excellence (attached as Appendix).***

In order to be effective partners, all stakeholders must communicate respectfully and productively. There are several ways that Brilla communicates with families throughout the year:

- **Communication Fliers:** Monthly, each family receives a Brilla Newsletter, Monthly Event Calendar, Grade-Specific Newsletters, and School Foods Calendar
 - There may be other fliers sent home periodically. All fliers are printed on colored paper to make them easily distinguishable in BrightWork folders. High interest fliers will be printed in color ink.
 - ClassTag will be used for classroom specific updates and news blasts.
- **Report Card Conferences:** At the end of each quarter, except quarter four, parents/guardians are required to come to the school for report card conferences with their child's teachers. At each conference parents/guardians receive a written report card that includes qualitative and quantitative data measures of their child's present level of performance in academic achievement and social-emotional growth. These conferences are critical opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about their child's progress and needs. **Report card conferences are mandatory and may not be missed under any circumstances.**
- **Behavior Alert / Academic Alert:** If a child is experiencing behavioral or academic challenges, the school may send home a written notice, or communicate challenges through an in-person meeting. Parents/guardians must make sure to review the concerns outlined in the letter with the child and to contact the school if there are any questions, or if any follow up is required.
- **Phone Calls:** Throughout the year, the school will also communicate via phone calls or written notes from a teacher, school administrator, or operations personnel. If the message requires a response, families are required to respond either by phone or in writing within 24 hours.
- **Meetings:** If the school requests a meeting with a parent/guardian, there is likely an urgent and important matter at hand. As such, timely scheduling is required. Should a family wish to schedule a meeting with a teacher or administrator, they are advised to contact that staff member directly and schedule the meeting at a mutually desirable time.

- **Visits:** To arrange a visit to the school, please see the section on *School Visitor Policy*.
- **Parent/Guardian Concerns:** If families have a concern about a school policy, academic grade, discipline decision, or anything else, Brilla suggests to first take some time to reflect on the matter before addressing the issue. If the parent/guardian is still concerned after a day or two has passed, and the issue has not been resolved, the school should be contacted in a respectful, calm, and solutions-oriented manner. Brilla welcomes conversations that adhere to these norms and is always open to working in partnership toward mutually beneficial solutions and overall betterment for the students and the school community at large. Brilla understands and accepts that challenges can spark strong feelings on the part of all stakeholders. Still, the school is a place of business and respectful partnership, and must be treated as such. Any issues must be handled professionally and respectfully, and with appropriate concern for all parties involved.

Brilla requires families' support. Families enroll in Brilla because it is a demanding, rigorous school, with high expectations for academics and behavior. All stakeholders – parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators – play a critical role in students' success and work together to ensure all children gain the knowledge they need to be successful in their present life, through high school, college, and beyond. Core to Brilla's mission is the belief that school and home are each a part of the same team: working together as partners ensures each child will succeed.

Promotion to the Next Grade

In order to be promoted to the next grade level, students must meet the minimum grade level promotional standards for their current grade level. Any students that have not met the minimum, end-of-year standards 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 the student will benefit from repeating the grade level. Ensuring each student's setting from one year to the next is appropriate given their specific learning needs is essential. There are instances in which a child that is below grade level may be promoted. For example, a 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. The school administration reserves the right to mandate academic summer school as a necessary intervention for a student. The school's administration meets with families to discuss the promotion decisions and communicate any additional strategies for supporting the child at home.

Criteria for Promotion:

- **Perform at or above grade level** in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies.
- **Attendance:** Any student that is absent more than 10 times is at risk of being retained.
- **Grade level social and emotional competence** is another factor that is considered in determining promotional readiness.
- **Homework completion and weekly test scores** show scholars' achievement level and corresponding readiness to move on to more challenging content in the next grade level.

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

The Student Services Manager reviews all student IEPs and helps develop the metrics that are used to determine if students are reaching the goals written in their IEPs. Brilla is dedicated to ensuring students receiving Special Education services are making an appropriate rate of progress. Brilla staff work with parents/guardians to make sure that all parties are fully aware of students' goals and their IEP specific requirements.

Students receiving Special Education Services are held to the same standards for grade level promotion as their general education peers according to their IEP. Usually, students will be promoted to the next grade based on successful completion of the goals of the IEP; however, other circumstances are always considered. For example, if a program change is pending, meaning the student's setting would look different the following school year with adjusted supports, or a student has significant attendance or behavioral challenges unrelated to their IEP, the student may or may not qualify for retention, independent of their Special Education designation.

Discipline

"Love and Logic" Discipline Philosophy and Approach

Brilla does not believe in a systems approach to discipline. Brilla believes there are logical consequences for actions and that, before an action happens, there should not be consequences already in place. Brilla's system is principle-based on the theory that students can learn to solve their own problems and that each student is unique in how he/she responds to consequences. Love and Logic rewards pro-social choices in a non-prescriptive manner. In other words, rewards and consequences are logical and student-specific. This structure is intended to put the thinking on students, to make them owners of their learning and choices, to ensure students are intrinsically motivated, and to bring about lasting change in student behavior and reflection.

Those core beliefs of Love and Logic include:

- Maintaining dignity for the adult and child
- Whenever possible, sharing the control
- Whenever possible, sharing the thinking -- get the child to do more
- If consequences are necessary, using the empathy-with-consequences approach

At each Parent University, families have the opportunity to learn more about the Love and Logic approach and practice different techniques. A more detailed policy can be requested in the main office.

Hours of Operation

Brilla elementary schools operate from 7:30 A.M. until 3:45 P.M., Monday through Thursday. School is dismissed at 1:00 P.M. on Fridays. Students are required to arrive at school on time (by 7:45 A.M. at the latest) and to remain in school until dismissal at 3:45 P.M. (1:00 P.M. on Fridays). Prioritizing attendance and timeliness sends a message to children that school is extremely important.

Lost and Found

The school will keep a small lost and found box in a designated location. Parents/guardians may come in any day between 7:30 A.M. and 5:30 P.M. to search the Lost and Found. At the end of each quarter, 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 students or teachers during the day.** Students and teachers may not receive incoming phone calls or messages unless it is an emergency that requires immediate attention. As such, messages for staff during school hours should be kept to a minimum.

To get a message to a child's teacher, please check the distributed homework sheet and call the teacher on his/her cell phone number provided. Teachers and staff may also be messaged through ClassTag. Brilla staff check messages and voicemails frequently and are committed to returning calls within one business day.

Nursing Services & Medication

Nursing services are provided by the Department of Health. It is recommended that parents/guardians 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. The School 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. These forms are available in the main office.

If a child requires medication during school hours, the school's Operations Manager can provide a Medical Administration Form (or MAF). Completed MAFs enable the building nurse to store and administer medication. However, medication cannot be administered to children until the 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 medications. The building nurse will keep a detailed log of all medications that are administered.

Transportation

Brilla Schools are accessible by an extensive public transportation network. Each school is located a few blocks from major subway and MTA bus lines. Many students live in the surrounding neighborhood and walk to school.

Brilla recognizes 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 students, and Brilla coordinates with the DOE Office of Pupil Transportation (OPT) to access MetroCards for families. Special education students can receive transportation as mandated in their IEPs. The school works closely with the CSE to ensure appropriate transportation is provided. Families of students who do not qualify for bus services, or a full or half-fare MetroCard, are responsible for arranging their child's transportation to and from school.

School Calendar & Closings

Please see the Brilla Public Charter Schools calendar (included as an *Appendix* in this Handbook) for the scheduled school days for each school year.

For weather related closures, Brilla Schools only close in case of inclement weather conditions. In such situations, Brilla follows the NYC Department of Education closings. Please listen to local radio and television stations for updates. If New York City announces a delayed opening or closing, Brilla follows accordingly.

School Lunch Program

Both breakfast and lunch are available at Brilla. 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 students. The lunch application form is used to determine the level of assistance that a child receives.

Parents/guardians may send lunch to school. If lunch is sent to school with a child, Brilla requires nutritious foods only. Unhealthy drinks (e.g., sodas or juices) or unhealthy snacks (snacks high in fat, calories, or sugar, such as fried chips, cookies, etc.) are not permitted at school. Foods that are high in sugar content cause students to become hyper and then to lose energy and feel sluggish. This influence of high-sugar foods has a negative impact on learning. As such, Brilla will only allow healthy food and beverage options (such as fruit and water) instead of candy or soda. The school reserves the right to confiscate and discard any unhealthy food and drinks that are brought to school.

School Visitor Policy

Visitors, especially parents/guardians, are a vital part of the Brilla community. Families are welcomed as volunteers, observers, and partners in the education of students.

Parents/guardians who would like to visit should contact classroom teachers to make arrangements. Upon arriving, all visitors must sign in with the Main Office to receive a visitor's pass. Upon entering the building, Brilla's security guard will request visitors' names and corresponding identification, and keep a record of all visits.

If a visitor is coming to school to drop something off for a student or to leave a message, visitors are still required to come first to the Main Office. To ensure student and staff safety, unannounced visitors cannot be in the building without explicit permission and a visitor's pass. The school administration reserves the right to ask any visitor to leave the building at anytime.

Student Records

The school administration is responsible for all student records. The school will discuss, explain, and/or make available any records on file to an eligible student (18 years old or greater) or parents/guardians. If a parent/guardian would like to examine a child's record,

the parent/guardian should submit a request in writing to the Principal or to the Operations Manager. The requesting party can request a copy of some or all of the information contained on the student's file. Once requested, records are sent within 10 days to the eligible student or parent/guardian.

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

School Uniforms

All students must come to school in uniform every day. If a student arrives to school out of uniform, parents/guardians are notified immediately and asked to bring in a uniform before the student is sent to class. If the school has extra uniforms on hand, staff may have the child change himself/herself into the borrowed clothing. In the event that Brilla lends clothing, families are responsible for washing and returning the items within three business days. Brilla adheres to a strict uniform policy for several reasons:

- 1) Uniforms unite students as a community.** The consistent Brilla polo serves as a powerful visual statement of community. When students are dressed in their uniforms, they are making a commitment to live up to the school's values.
- 2) Uniforms reduce distractions and clothing competition.** Often students 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 promote equality.** Whether families have high income or low income, the students come to school looking the same way. By wearing a uniform, no one is diminished for what he/she wears, and students are not able to compare what they do or do not have.
- 4) Uniforms look professional.** Students look neat when they arrive to school with shirts tucked into their pants. Professional attire reinforces the idea that students come to school "dressed for work" and prepared to focus and learn. Studies have shown that professional, neat attire and high achievement are correlated.

Students may not change out of the Brilla uniform at any point during the school day (with the exception of performances).

General Uniform Requirements

- Uniform checks occur during Scholar Arrival, Morning Routines (teachers record infractions), and before transitions
- **Boys:** rubber-soled, ALL-BLACK shoes, black socks, gray pants, black uniform shirt, black belts (for non-elastic pants)
- **Girls:** rubber-soled, ALL-BLACK shoes, black socks or tights/leggings, gray pants, Brilla plaid jumpers, or skirts (3rd and 4th grades only), black uniform shirt
 - Uniform shirts must always be tucked in; white undershirts may be worn underneath the uniform shirt
 - Optional: Brilla sweaters
- Jewelry is limited to one item each (one necklace, bracelet, ring, pair of earrings)
- Teachers mark uniform infractions on the BrightWork cover pages of scholars not in compliance with school dress code
- If uniform non-compliance becomes a pattern or chronic problem, the family will be called in for a formal meeting, and the incident will be recorded on the scholar's file
- Families are contacted immediately for egregious infractions and the family is required to bring a change of clothes to adjust the uniform as soon as possible
- **Exceptions:**
 - On Fridays, scholars may wear Brilla t-shirts or college t-shirts (tucked-in) in place of their polos
 - Outdoor trips have slightly modified guidelines, always indicated on the Field Trip Permission Form

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 or other school leaders is encouraged if efforts among parties involved are not fruitful. If these efforts are not sufficient to resolve an issue, Brilla's policy for informal and formal complaints may be followed. The complaint policy and form can be requested from the Operations Manager in the Main Office.

Human Services

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

Key Phone Numbers

Child Abuse Care Line	1-800-872-2288
Domestic Violence Hotline	1-800-621 HOPE
Drug Dependence Hotline	1-800-LIFENET
Mental Health Hotline	1-800-LIFENET
Police/Fire Emergency	911
NYC 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