

Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School

FAQs for Families

LOGISTICS/FIRST DAY INFORMATION

Who is my student's Assistant Principal?

6th grade AP- Angelica Kamysz akamysz@op97.org

7th grade AP- Michelle Reed mreed@op97.org

8th grade AP- Stacie Klein sklein@op97.org

What are the School Hours?

Unlike D97 elementary schools, Brooks has the following school hours every day of the week (including Wednesdays): 9 am – 3:30 pm. Students are able to enter the building at 8:50 am, unless they are a part of an extracurricular activity that meets before school, have a pass to meet with a teacher or sign in to access the Media Center. Students that wait outside are not supervised before 8:30 am. We ask that students not arrive at school before that time, unless they are part of a supervised activity as described above.

Are students issued Student ID Cards?

For safety, all Brooks students are given a picture identification card (ID) at the beginning of the school year. I.D.'s are used for access to early school entry, the Media Center, lunch accounts and buses, and the students must have their ID worn around their neck at all times during the day. In the event that a student loses their I.D., a new one may be purchased in the office for \$5.00.

If my student is new to D97 and doesn't have a picture on their ID, what do they do?

Have your student touch base with his/her advisory teacher. Your student will be referred to the office for help with a picture. We usually take new student pictures during the lunch period.

Where should students enter the building?

To facilitate large numbers of students entering Brooks at the same time, entrance doors have been designated by grade. Doors are opened for students to enter at 8:50 a.m.

All bus riders – regardless of grade level – enter from the Clinton Street entrance.

All other 6th grade students enter and can be picked up after the school day from the south side of the building, at the Washington Street entrance.

All other 7th and 8th grade students enter through and can be picked up after the school day from the main entrance on Kenilworth.

What is PowerSchool?

PowerSchool is the school's online grade book, attendance and lunch money tool. You can check your student's attendance record, class grades, status of assignments, lunch money account balance, etc. A link to PowerSchool is located on the Brooks home page, or you can find it [here](#). Families can create their own username and password to access PowerSchool or you can use your student's username and password. If you need additional help with PowerSchool, please contact Tasha Guerino at tguerino@op97.org.

What if I don't have my student's username or password for PowerSchool?

If you need additional help with PowerSchool, please contact Tasha Guerino at tguerino@op97.org.

When will students get their class schedules?

For 6th grade students, your student's assigned math level will be sent out in July. All final schedules with team assignment, teachers and classes will be mailed out 7-10 days before school starts for all grade levels.

The schedule that was mailed home does not seem correct. Who do I contact with questions?

First check your student's schedule on PowerSchool. If the schedule on PowerSchool does not seem correct, contact your student's grade level Assistant Principal (AP) or Tasha Guerino at tguerino@op97.org.

How much time is given between classes?

Students have three minutes to get from one class to another. To be on time for class, students need to plan ahead and only visit their locker at the following times: before and after school; before and after lunch; and before and after P.E.

When will my student receive their locker assignment?

6th Grade students will receive their lock and locker assignment during Information Night. 7th and 8th grade students receive their lock and locker assignment from their Advisory teacher on the first day of school. The school issues a lock for the locker. Please do NOT purchase a lock for your student.

What are the dimensions of the lockers?

The lockers are 11" deep and 10" wide.

Do students carry their backpacks with them throughout the day?

No. If students carry a bag with them throughout the day, it should be no larger than a cinch sack.

Does my student need to bring all of their school supplies on the first day of school?

No. A pencil/pen and a notebook will be all they need on their first day of school. (and locker space is limited!) 6th Grade Students can bring all of their supplies on Information Night to store in their lockers.

Which classroom should my student go to on the first day of school?

All students should go to their Advisory classroom on the first day of school.

Does my student need to bring their gym clothes to school on the first day of school?

No. All PE uniforms that have been purchased before the start of school will be distributed during your child's PE class during the first week of school.

How do I purchase a gym lock for my student?

Students will purchase gym locks for \$5 in P.E. class during the first week of school.

Can gym locks be reused from year to year?

Yes.

What is the policy in regards to students having phones at school?

Students are allowed to have phones at school, but they must be silent during the day. If a student's phone is out during the day, it will be taken from the student and sent to the office, where it can be picked up at the end of the day. If it becomes a chronic concern, parents will be requested to pick up their student's phone.

Are there before or after-school child care services?

There are no school-based before and after-school child care services at this time. Some outside organizations offer before and after school programming to our local students. For example, the [YMCA of West Cook](#) offers a World Teens program: "Based on a club model, teens can participate in groups like entrepreneur club, young adult exercise, creative arts club, journalism club, intramural sports, and more. There is a nutritional snack served each day, and there is time for teens to complete homework or projects with the guidance of their counselors."

Are the after-school programs consistent throughout the week/year?

After-school programs are not consistent throughout the year, with each program typically having their own season and practice schedule (e.g., cross country in the Fall and track in the Spring).

How often will my 6th and 8th grader see each other?

They typically won't see much of each other during the day -- maybe occasionally during passing periods. Each grade has its own part of the building and its own lunch period, though Language B and Arts course selections can be mixed.

What is the biggest adjustment for elementary students in the first months of middle school?

Changing classes and having multiple teachers is typically the biggest adjustment. You can help your student adjust by helping them to develop methods to stay organized, getting to know their teachers, and having them practice, practice and practice some more with opening their lock! Teach your student to use PowerSchool and learn about Canvas (the Learning Management App), and be sure to attend Information Night the week before school starts to walk your student's schedule.

The second big adjustment is more social in nature. Friendships often change in middle school, as children develop new interests and meet new people. It can be difficult when a friendship your student has had for years changes. Encourage your student to meet new people at Brooks, and to try to keep old friends, too, but know that friendships can't be forced when they've run their natural course. Your student's teachers, Assistant Principal and our social workers (Hannah Boudreau and Jennifer Olsen) are on hand to help you and your student navigate these social changes.

ACADEMIC SCHEDULE**What courses will my student be taking?**

Students will have the following courses: Language Arts, Math, Science, Humanities, WIN (What I Need) for 2 trimesters paired with STEM (Design and Modeling in 6th grade, VexRobotics in 7th Grade, Electronics in 8th grade) for 1 trimester, Physical Education, Language B course (Spanish or French), Arts Course Selection (Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Arts Foundation, or Speech, Drama & Debate)

How many classes make up a regular school day?

There are nine periods, including lunch and P.E. (which is required each day). On Mondays, there is an additional Advisory period first thing in the morning. Here is a link to the [current school schedule at Brooks](#).

What can we expect in terms of class size?

Class sizes range in size depending on the subject area, but typically between 23 to 30 students, with Chorus, Band, Orchestra and PE being larger up to 40 to 50 students.

How are twins or triplets placed in the classes? Will they have the same core teachers and the same homework?

Typically twins or triplets are assigned to the same team, unless parents request otherwise.

TEAM ASSIGNMENTS**How many core teams are planned for each grade in the 2017-18 school year?**

Your child will be assigned to one of three grade groups called “teams”. Each of these diverse teams of students will work together with a small multidisciplinary team of teachers to teach the following subject areas (math, science, language arts, and humanities). These teams provide students with a smaller, more supportive environment for social, emotional, and academic development, often referred to as a “school within a school.”

Do students/families have any input as to what team the child will be on? Can we request to be with friends?

The teams are large enough that your student will have some existing friends across classes, but requests for placement cannot be honored. Students are assigned to teams in order to ensure a good mix of students across gender, race, socioeconomic status and abilities. Expect that your student’s friend set will shift over the course of middle school based on extra-curricular activities and other shared interests.

Will students from the same school be placed on the same team when they enter 6th grade so they are comfortable with one another?

Students from partner schools are mixed across the teams. An integral part of the middle school concept is the advisory class which occurs once per week. The advisory class is a smaller group of students within the team. It is designed to provide a balance between the academic demands and other developmental needs. Advisory supports the 6th grade students as they adjust to the middle school culture, helps the 8th grade students prepare for high school, and provides a small group setting to address the issues and needs specific to middle school age students.

Are the teacher teams going to be realigned over the summer or are the current teachers who we should expect next year?

There is typically some shifting of teacher responsibilities across teams and, less frequently, across grade levels.

MATH

When will we learn about our student's math placement?

Letters will be mailed home in July to 6th grade families with their student's math placement. Questions about math placement can be directed to Principal Capuder. (acapuder@op97.org)

My student is taking a math enrichment class this summer. How will my student's performance affect their math placement for the fall?

The class offered between 5th and 6th grade is a review course and will not impact math placement for 6th grade. If your child is taking the math enrichment class through District 97 during the summer between 6th and 7th grade or 7th and 8th grade, then he/she will take a test at the end of the class which will help assess whether your student is ready to move to the next level.

Is there any additional way, besides meeting the testing criteria outline in D97 website, a student could advance to a higher level math class?

No. However, if your student is excelling or struggling in the math class they've been placed, meet with your student's teacher to discuss how to best meet your student's academic needs.

DIFFERENTIATION**How is differentiation handled at Brooks?**

It is treated as an expected part of the curriculum delivery model. Our teachers have been trained in the various differentiation models and the expectation is that all subject area instructors have it embedded within their curriculum. Some examples of differentiation include opportunities where the class may be reading the same text in a Language Arts class but there will be a variety of assessment strands that students can access. In other cases, there might be a single focal point for the unit, but there will be a varied number of texts that are utilized within one class. This allows the teacher to keep the whole group together within the confines of the lesson, while at the same time allowing for layers of differentiation.

Do you have a reading specialist on staff?

Middle schools do not typically have a designated staff member who handles specific reading issues. If there are concerns about a potential reading deficit and parents would like some more detailed testing done, we have a building team that meets weekly to discuss these issues. There are individuals on the team who have strong reading backgrounds.

Is there advanced Reading/English?

There is not a formal class offering of advanced reading. Students are challenged within their classes through differentiation as mentioned above.

LANGUAGE B (Spanish/French) and ARTS COURSE SELECTION**When do students choose their LANGUAGE B and ARTS COURSE SELECTIONS?**

Students choose their selections in February/March of the prior school year. If your student has not yet selected his or her Language B and Arts Selection courses, please contact Tasha Guerino at tguerino@op97.org.

Can my student change his or her Language B or Arts Course Selections prior to the start of 6th grade?

Yes, but limitedly as classes do reach their maximum limits, through middle of July, but you will need to do this through Ms. Guerino.

Is there an opportunity for my student to learn guitar at Brooks?

A guitar class is offered after school through the BRAVO Performing Arts program.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Do the students change for gym?

Yes. Students have P.E. each day. Families need to purchase a uniform and combination lock for your student at the beginning of the school year. Students are expected to wear appropriate gym shoes for P.E. class as well. Students will change into gym uniforms each day for P.E.

LUNCH

How long will students have to eat lunch?

Students' lunch is one period in length. Half of the period is spent eating lunch and the other half of the period is spent socializing either outside or inside, depending upon weather.

How will students know if they are to eat or attend social time first during lunch period?

The students will be randomly assigned a lunch group on their schedule. The lunch group is assigned a color which will be indicated on the student ID cards. Each week, the colored group that eats first will rotate with the other colored group, enabling each student an opportunity to eat first every other week.

How does lunch or a morning snack or afternoon snack work?

There are no official a.m. or p.m. snack breaks built into the schedule.

Where can students eat in the building?

Students eat in the cafeteria and potentially in a teacher's classroom, if the student has pre-arranged to meet with the teacher during lunch. Brooks has a closed campus policy. During school hours no students may leave the school campus for any reason without being signed out by a parent or guardian.

Does my student's food service balance carry over from elementary school to middle school?

Yes. If your student was enrolled in a D97 elementary school in spring 2016, his/her balance carries over to the D97 middle school. You can check your student's balance on PowerSchool.

How do I order Starship lunches for my student, sponsored by PTO? (Mondays)

You can order Monday lunches online starting in August. More information will be shared over the summer. Questions? Please contact Michele McAndrews (mrvm@sbcglobal.net)

How do I order Pizza lunches for my student, sponsored by BRAVO? (Fridays)

You can order Friday lunches online here: <http://goo.gl/Awxggv>
Questions? Please contact Randi Orlin (rorlin@op97.org)

Does the low income coverage for fees and food apply in middle school?

Yes. Families can apply for free and reduced lunch options, just as they do in the elementary schools.

HOMWORK

Where can we find information about our student's assigned homework?

Each student is assigned a Chromebook loaded with the Canvas application. Canvas is the Learning Management System that all teachers use to post homework assignments. Parents/Guardians are asked to register for an observer account on Canvas. You or your student can email the teacher for questions about the homework.

What is Canvas?

Canvas is a Learning Management System (LMS), a program that enables teachers, students and families to communicate in a centralized location. Canvas allows teachers to share resources and assignments for students, offers multiple ways for students to complete and submit work and provides a safe place for students to collaborate.

How much homework can be expected? How many hours per week?

As a rule of thumb, expect that each night there will be 10 minutes of homework for each year in school (60 minutes for 6th grade, etc.). That said, every student is different in their abilities, focus and usage of in-school time for completing homework, and there will be natural ebb and flow of homework depending on what is happening in the school schedule. The core team teachers typically try to coordinate homework and assessments to avoid major projects or tests happening on the same day.

How does my student check his/her grades?

Students should access grades for assignments, projects and tests through PowerSchool (NOT Canvas). Canvas is used as a tool to post assignments and related resources to complete the assignments. Occasionally, assignments can be automatically graded via canvas, but the grade reflected in Canvas is not the "official" grade for the assignment. Grades are accurately recorded in PowerSchool only.

Do you teach students organizational skills to complete assignments on time?

Organization is one of the most important skills that students need to master in middle school if they are to be successful throughout the remainder of their academic career. Linked is a planning document to help a student plan [materials to bring to each class](#). Teachers work with 6th grade students to teach them these skills through the use of Canvas as a planner, setting interim project deadlines, and using study guides, among other things. You can reinforce these skills at home by suggesting your child review PowerSchool for missing assignments and/or lower assessment scores. Generally, there are opportunities in each class to redo/retake/make corrections to tests to improve understanding and ultimately improve the grade. We encourage students to be able to manage their progress independently. Putting structures in place at home for your child to develop a habit of independently reviewing their own progress and making a plan to complete missing assignments or grow understanding to improve test performance sets him/her on a path for future academic success. Linked is a [planning document](#) that students can use when he/she reviews their progress on PowerSchool.

We have class called WIN (What I need). This is a class students will have for 2 of the 3 trimesters, the other trimester students attend their STEM class. It is a class designed to provide enrichment and supportive opportunities for all students. In 6th grade, the first 6 weeks of the trimester, students will be with the teacher outlined on his/her schedule. However, every few weeks teachers will review student progress in all classes and re-assign students to different teachers to help provide enrichments and supports for all students. Particularly in 6th grade, many students struggle organizationally. This is one way students may obtain

support. Additionally, students may have some identified gap in understanding pertaining to reading or mathematics. So a group of students may work with a teacher to develop the skills needed to close the gaps in learning. We also are using this class time as an opportunity to provide some enriching experiences for students. If your student is still struggling academically, we encourage you to reach out to the team to set up a time to discuss crafting a detailed plan. If this approach does not yield success, the parents can request a building team meeting (Social Worker, School Psychologist, Speech and Language, etc) to further investigate possible solutions.

CONFERENCES

What is the conference format? With whom do parents meet? Are there other opportunities to meet with academic teachers?

Twice a year parents sign up to have conferences with their child's core teaching team. Historically we have used a student-led portfolio conference format.

Since teachers in a team have a shared planning period, you can request a meeting with one or more of your student's teachers to discuss your student's academic performance at any time throughout the year. Parents/guardians can also email or call any of your student's teachers at any time to discuss questions or issues.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

What after-school activities are available at Brooks?

There are many extra-curricular activities offered at Brooks. [Here is a link](#) to activities that were available in 2017-2018 for students.

How are parents and students notified about when and how to join extra-curricular activities?

There are multiple ways that coaches and other extra-curricular activity leaders get the word out about how and when to join their activity. Daily announcements and signs posted at school are targeted to the students. Information is typically posted on the Brooks website. The meeting dates, times and locations can be found [here](#).

What is the process for enrolling in extra-curricular activities?

All students participating in an extra-curricular sport must have a current physical on file that is not older than 1 year. The process for enrolling varies by activity. On the [website](#), you'll see we show the seasons for each extra-curricular activity. We target getting the word out about enrollment, application or tryouts for individual activities at least two weeks prior to the date.

How many extra-curricular activities are too much? What is the best number?

There is no one answer that works for every student, and each activity requires a different level of time commitment. First, consider your student. Does your student love to be busy, or do they need their down time? Does your student have a hard time transitioning to new environments? The answers to these questions will help you set the appropriate limits for your student. The second consideration is the time required for the activity of interest. For example, if your student is in BRAVO's 6th grade winter play, rehearsals are held most afternoons making it difficult to participate in other after-school activities at the same time. If your student is

interested in Orff drumming, on the other hand, the time commitment is one or two mornings per week, and is more compatible with other after-school activities.

Are the extra-curriculars held both morning/before and afternoon/after school or just one or the other for each club? What are the times?

Each activity leader or coach sets their own schedule. For example, this year BRAVO theater activities were after-school, boys basketball had a mix of before and after school practices, and Orff is only in the mornings.

Do you have coaches in place for next year?

Coaching assignments for any of our sports for the 2017-2018 school have been set and reflected in [extra-curricular information](#) document.

Can a student be in Jazz Lab band without having band as an elective?

Students need to be in the full year music (Band, Orchestra or Chorus) elective in order to participate in Jazz Lab Band and Jazz Ensemble. Jazz Ensemble requires try-outs and is available to 7th and 8th graders. If the student plays piano, bass, or guitar, they need to be currently taking private lessons on that instrument. These students should also have a minimum of 1 years experience on guitar, piano or bass.

If my student isn't in chorus, band or orchestra, can she still participate in Beauty Shop or Shoppettes?

Students can only audition for Beautyshop, Barbershop and Shoppettes if they are in Chorus, Band or Orchestra. The expectation for these advanced level groups is that a student is learning to read music in our school-based classes as the small groups move at a very fast pace.

When does registration for VEX Robotics begin?

In early September, a flyer will be sent home with registration timing and process. Typically parents and their students are required to attend a VEX Robotics informational meeting, followed by the submission of an application to join. Students are notified in early October if they are on the team. Of note, this extracurricular activity is managed by Oak Park Education Foundation, a privately funded nonprofit organization that implements hands-on, curriculum-enriching programs for the children of District 97 public schools.

CLIMATE

What is Brooks doing to cultivate a positive culture in the school?

We continue to stress the importance of our team design. The heart and soul of this approach is to help create a sense of community within a relatively small area. Having access to four/five content teachers all together in one hallway as well as a grade-specific assistant principal gives students access to a consistent group of adults. We are also working to make more and more connections with our families, seeking out activities that encourage parents to feel more comfortable in the building and closer to teachers.

Finally, we will be using the [International Baccalaureate Learner Profile](#) to further the discussion of positive behaviors. Key attributes of this profile include students being Caring, Principled, and Reflective. As we move closer into full implementation an IB culture, this approach to set high expectations for students will be invaluable.

What is the Brooks policy regarding bullying?

District 97 has set forth a [policy on bullying, intimidation and harassment](#), which Brooks follows. We take bullying very seriously, and aim to create a positive learning environment for all students. Our administrative leaders, supported by two dedicated social workers, are always looking for ways to proactively address potential issues. One of our social workers is specifically working with the 6th grade to ensure that this very crucial year is a positive one. Also, our Advisory class is a venue for discussing bullying prevention in a smaller, more intimate environment.

How does Brooks address cyberbullying?

We have had yearly assemblies that involve the State's Attorney's office sending out their team to communicate the dangers and potential consequences of cyberbullying. Our two full-time social workers also work very directly with our students to address this topic when it occurs.

What is the role of the Oak Park Police in disciplinary matters?

Discipline responsibility starts with the teacher and includes the grade-level assistant principals and school principal when necessary. Both middle schools also have a Student Resource Officer (SRO). The SRO's role is primarily to engage with students in a positive and proactive manner. The strength of the program is the effectiveness of the relationships between students and the officer. There have, however, been instances where they have been involved in discipline matters. These tend to be of a more serious nature.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

What is the PTO?

All parents and guardians are welcome to attend the PTO's monthly meetings and participate on one of its many active committees. The PTO calendar is available on the [Brooks website](#). Among its other activities, the PTO provides a weekly newsletter that communicates school events, transition activities (5th to 6th, and 8th to 9th), and volunteer opportunities (including serving a lunch fundraisers to the students).

How do I subscribe to the Brooks PTO weekly newsletter?

To begin receiving the Brooks PTO Bulletin, you can email: gwendolynbrookspto@gmail.com.

If you are interested in receiving important news and event information from District 97 and Oak Park community as a whole, you can subscribe for RSS feed [HERE](#) and [visit digital backpack](#).

When are PTO meetings?

PTO meetings at Brooks are generally the first Monday of every month starting at 7pm in the Media Center.

What is BRAVO?

This group is unique to Brooks. Parents can serve on the advisory board, the BRAVO! Council, and can volunteer for various BRAVO! projects. Additional information about BRAVO! is available on the [Brooks website](#).

Can parents volunteer to chaperone field trips?

Parents are sometimes needed to chaperone field trips. Teachers and teaching teams may send home requests for this type of assistance with students as it is needed. If you are interested in serving in this capacity, please contact your student's team leader.

Can parents help out the office staff or classroom teacher?

The Brooks administrative office has occasional special projects (mailings, packet assembly, data entry, etc.) that require volunteer assistance. If you are interested in volunteering in this capacity, please contact the Main Office at Brooks. Likewise, many teachers seek assistance in the classroom. Teachers will send home requests for parent classroom volunteers as needed.

Are there any other ways to volunteer?

Oak Park Education Foundation: The OPEF is a non-profit agency that sponsors after-school clubs at Brooks and other District 97 schools that bring together students with professionals in the community. Programs sponsored by the OPEF at Brooks Middle School include Science Alliance (scientists), Architecture Adventure (architects), and Vex Robotics (engineers). Got to www.opef.org to volunteer.