

Welcome to Merrill Middle School!

My name is Kathryn Panek and I'm honored to serve all of you as the principal of Merrill Middle School. This upcoming school year, 2020-2021, will be my 5th year at Merrill and my 3rd year as the principal. I have previously served in a number of roles in education, including special education teacher, adolescent literacy teacher, School Improvement Leader at Hoover High School, and as a middle level principal in Winterset. I am so very pleased to be a part of Des Moines Public Schools serving our exceptional students and families.

On a more personal note, my family includes two daughters, Abigail (14) and Eleanor (10), who love school, soccer, track and field, and being with their friends. My husband, Jeff, also serves our local community as the Assessment Manager for Des Moines Public Schools.

I have so enjoyed getting to know all of the students and families at Merrill, and I am looking forward to meeting our incoming group. We are an International Baccalaureate School, and I am profoundly moved by how Merrill really is a microcosm of the world. Our students are a remarkable group of hard working, interesting, and diverse learners. Every day I am here I see the future in our students and know it is bright.

The pandemic has thrown us a curveball as we welcome our incoming 6th grade class and support them in a smooth transition from elementary to middle school, but it won't deter our efforts: Here is what we have in the works right now:

- Virtual Small Groups: We would like to schedule virtual, small group FAQ sessions with 10 or so students at a time and a Merrill 6th grade teacher. This may be coordinated by the 5th grade teacher or by a teacher at Merrill. More info coming in the next few weeks.
- Family Night: Typically, on Thursday, April 30, we would be hosting rising 6th graders and their families for 6th Grade Family Night. This is a chance for families to visit Merrill, meet other 6th grade families, and learn more about a day in the life of a 6th grader at Merrill. The plan right now is to create a video to send to all of you and reschedule Family Night for this summer if and when the social distancing restrictions have been lifted.
- 1st Day of School: Wednesday, August 26th is the first day of school and is a full day of team building activities and helping students become familiar with the building and staff here at Merrill. Families are invited to join us for a sack lunch over the noon hour.

There are several avenues of communication that will help answer many of your questions about Merrill in the coming days. Our website, <https://merrill.dmschools.org/>, is updated daily and is full of information. We have a very active and supportive PTA (<https://merrill.dmschools.org/parents/pta/>) who walks alongside us and is always there with great ideas, monetary donations, and acts of kindness that bring joy to all. I hope that you will e-mail with any questions that you have, and when we are able to gather, I hope you will stop in and visit. Your input and support are very important to what we do here at Merrill. My promise to you is to work tirelessly to sustain and grow this wonderful community that I'm so lucky to serve.

Kathryn Panek

Principal

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