

2023-2024

MERRILL MIDDLE SCHOOL
FAMILY & STUDENT
HANDBOOK



*Creating a better and more
peaceful, liberated world.*



Merrill Middle School
5301 Grand Ave.
Des Moines, IA 50312
(515) 242-8448

Merrill Website:
merrill.dmschools.org

District Website:
dmschools.org

Des Moines Public Schools Mission

The Des Moines Public Schools Exist So That Graduates Possess the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities to Be Successful at the Next Stage of Their Lives.

Des Moines Public Schools Vision

Becoming the model for urban education in the United States.

Merrill Middle School Mission

To develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful, liberated world.

Welcome to Merrill!

Schools are so often the hub of communities, and I believe that this is true throughout our great city. Thank you for all you do on behalf of all of our students...both at home and throughout the community. From transporting your kids and their friends to and from school activities, voting in school elections, making sure students get a good night's rest, and communicating with us about how things are going for your child, we appreciate you! To have everyone working toward the same goal---improved learning for all students---can only be a positive for our students and community.

We hope that you will e-mail, call, and stop in and visit. Our partnership is very important to what we do here. We will strive every day to ensure that your student is prepared for whatever comes their way. Let's have a great year!

Kathryn Panek, Principal

*Note: This is the Merrill-specific handbook. Please [click here](#) to access the DMPS Middle School Handbook.

Merrill's Website: merrill.dmschools.org

Please check our website for dates, times, and details about all events and activities at Merrill. The webpage, which is updated daily, includes our calendar of events, the daily announcements, an electronic bulletin board with the latest news, and parent and student tabs full of information to help you navigate middle school. Save us to your favorites for quick access!

We use Infinite Campus to send out important and urgent information. Please make sure your contact information is accurate and you've checked "yes" to receive information from us.

Administration & Main Office Contact Information

Phone – 515-242-8448

Fax – 515-323-8656

Email: merrill@dmschools.org

Hours: 8:00 AM – 3:45 PM

Principal – Kathryn Panek
kathryn.panek@dmschools.org

Office Associate – Patricia Combs
Email: patricia.combs@dmschools.org

Associate Principal – Ryan Daugherty
ryan.daugherty@dmschools.org

Associate Principal – Danielle Taylor
danielle.taylor@dmschools.org

Student Engagement Coordinator – Martin Luft
martin.luft@dmschools.org

Behavior Interventionist – Paige Dahms
paige.dahms@dmschools.org

Restoration Safety Coordinator – James Turner
james.turner@dmschools.org

Office Manager – Brooke Austin

brooke.austin@dmschools.org

School Nurse – Kelli Luft
kelli.luft@dmschools.org

School Counselor – Kimber Foshe
kimber.foshe@dmschools.org
(Last Names A-K)

School Counselor – Emma Althaus
emma.althaus@dmschools.org
(Last Names L-Z)

Success Case Manager – Andrew Pavelka
andrew.pavelka@dmschools.org

Community Schools – Simone Freeman
simone.freeman@dmschools.org

Bell Schedule: Please click [here](#) to view the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade bell schedules.

Morning Arrival: Students may enter the school beginning at 8:10 AM. School hours are 8:30 AM to 3:25 PM.

Walkers: Please use the crosswalk near the east end of the building to cross Grand Avenue.

Bikers: Please park your bikes at the bike rack near the west end of the building.

Riders: You may drop your student off at three different locations:

- Main entrance loop in front of Merrill
- In front of Merrill in the lane along Grand Ave.
- Shriver: There is a sidewalk from Shriver to the back field of Merrill. Students should proceed to the front of the building to enter Merrill.

School Bus/DART Bus: All students arriving via bus will be dropped off at the west end of the building in the bus turnaround. Please check the Parent Portal on Infinite Campus for routing information. Students must have their student ID to access the DART bus.

Students may come to the main office after 8:10 AM for any business before school starts.

Breakfast: DMPS provides a FREE breakfast to all students. Upon arrival to school at 8:10, students who want breakfast may head to the cafeteria to eat. Students arriving at 8:25 or later who still want breakfast will take a “grab and go” breakfast with them to 1st period. Students need to wrap up breakfast in their classroom by 8:40.

Dismissal: School dismisses at 3:25 PM. You may pick your student up at three different locations:

- Main entrance loop in front of Merrill
- In front of Merrill in the lane along Grand Ave.
- Students may walk a short distance to Shriver or the Temple B’Nai Jeshurun for pick up.

All students departing on a bus will be picked up at the west end of the building in the bus turnaround.

Unless students are under the direct supervision of an adult (homework help, clubs, activities), all students need to exit the building by 3:35 PM. If you are looking for an after-school option, we have two community partners who provide after-school care. Please click [here](#) to learn more about the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Iowa, or [here](#) to learn more about the Wilkie House.

Anti-Bullying/Harassment: Bullying and harassment is against federal and state law, and against the policy and procedures of the District. The District is committed to maintaining an educational environment free of any form of bullying or harassment by or toward students, parents/guardians, employees, and volunteers while in school, at a school-sponsored activity, or at any school sponsored function. The District prohibits harassment or bullying based on the student’s actual or perceived race, color, creed, sex, age, religion, marital or familial status, ethnic background, national origin, ancestry, physical or mental ability or disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attribute, political party preference, political belief, or socio-economic background or familial status. Click [here](#) to read DMPS policies and procedures.

PROUD to be a Mustang: Our mission at Merrill is to create a better and more peaceful, liberated world. The Mustang is a very well-rounded animal. It is smart and capable. It is also kind-hearted. There is good reason why some ancient cultures consider it to be the most beautiful of all animals. It is persistent. A mustang is wild. It symbolizes free-spiritedness, vitality, and the freedom of humanity. It is a symbol of knowing one’s identity and being true to oneself. Thank you for exemplifying what it means to be a MUSTANG!

PROUD to be a Mustang is an acronym for the building-wide expectations that support an environment where all students can thrive. They are...

- (Be) **P**repared
- (Be) **R**espectful
- (Take) **O**wnership
- (Be) **U**nderstanding
- D**ream (Big)

Students are introduced to *PROUD to be a Mustang* during the first few days of school where we converse with students about the Mustang PROUD and teach and practice the expectations in our common areas including hallways, restrooms, busses, cafeteria, and recess area. In addition, students will engage in dialogue regularly about what it means to be a Mustang in the classroom. Throughout the year we will continue to strengthen our learning community and celebrate student success!

Safe and Supportive School: Below is an overview of some of the things we do at Merrill to create a safe and supportive school.

Engaging Lessons: First and foremost, teachers at Merrill collaborate regularly with their colleagues to develop lessons in which students engage with their peers as they inquire into the world around them. We want students IN the classroom to read, write, think, discuss, and problem-solve. When students are in the classroom learning, we know they are safe and supported.

Monday Message: We review our common expectations for all students each Monday and periodically throughout each day. *PROUD to be a Mustang* is the foundation of these messages.

Classroom Conversations – Restrooms, Cafeteria, Hallways, and other spaces: Classrooms discuss the following questions...What is the purpose of the space? What is your responsibility as a student in that space? What is the responsibility of others? What do you need from the adults in this building as we think about safety in these spaces?

See something. Say Something. We regularly remind students of the ways they can communicate with us when things aren't going well. Students can tell an adult that is close by, email a staff member, or tell a family member who can then call the school.

What happens when a report is made? When we receive a report from a student or community member, or if something just seems off, we go on a fact-finding mission. We review security camera footage, interview students and/or staff, and schedule times to observe the problematic space, among other things.

Follow-Up: Finally, we follow up with students and families to determine the next steps. We work to mediate the conflict and support the restoration of relationships. Additional support beyond mediation includes individual plans to check in with a "go-to" staff member, a referral to a school-based support team, a schedule change, rethinking of a policy or procedure in the school, etc. We continue to work with students and families until the issue is resolved.

Final Note: Please know that we don't see, hear, or know everything. If a concern arises, please don't hesitate to reach out. We are here to help problem-solve. Thank you for your partnership!

Mustang Minutes: Our mission at Merrill is to create a better and more peaceful, liberated world. Mustang Minutes provides additional time to establish a culture that supports improving social, emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for all students. During Mustang Minutes students will be engaging in community building, reading, and writing, using the time productively in service of their academic and social-emotional needs.

Teachers: Teachers are available between 8:15-3:45 PM. The best way to contact a teacher is via e-mail. [Here](#) is a directory of the Merrill staff. If you would like to meet face to face with a Merrill staff member, please don't hesitate to reach out to schedule a time.

Lockers: Each student is offered a locker – some students share with another student from their advisory class. Students have time between classes to go to their lockers to get what they need for their next class. Students may carry a backpack, binder, pencil case, or a small purse if needed. Students must keep their locker combinations confidential and should only use the locker assigned to them.

Computers: All students will be assigned a computer and charger that they will carry with them both to and from school, as well as throughout the day. Students should be sure that the computer is charged and ready to go each day. We will not have loaners available for students who forget their computer at home. If students need to leave their computers at school overnight, we will develop a plan with those individuals.

Phones and Personal Electronics: Technology is a part of our world, both at home and school. At Des Moines Public Schools, we are fortunate to have a computer for each student which allows us to address the educational needs of our students.

While we recognize that cell phones are a part of our everyday lives, they are not a necessary requirement to meet curricular outcomes. In fact, cell phones are often a distraction to our students' ability to engage in their learning. To maintain an optimal learning environment for all students and to ensure safety and limit distractions, we request your support as we curtail the student use of cell phones and other personal devices at DMPS middle schools.

Cell phones may be used before school and during lunchtime if they are used appropriately. Cell phones should be silenced or off and kept in the student's pocket or backpack at all other times.

In the case of a family emergency, the office staff will give your child a message or have them return your call. Health concerns can be addressed using the telephone in the nurse's office. We expect all students to comply with this policy to support learning and we will do our best to help our children understand the need for this policy. Thank you in advance for your partnership with our middle schools and your continued support to provide a safe and productive learning environment that limits distractions for all students.

Cell Phone and Other Personal Devices General Understanding and Consequences

1. Cell phones, ear buds and other personal devices must remain off and in the student's pocket, locker, or book bag while in learning spaces.
2. Students contacting parents: Students will ask teachers before they contact parents when they are ill, upset or require something. Teachers will assist students in contacting home through the classroom or office phone. Upon request, private space will be provided for students in the office.
3. Any device will be used responsibly. When usage is inappropriate, there will be consequences such as temporary confiscation of a personal device, communication with parents, or inaccessibility to technology for learning. Digital citizenship is important. "Doing the right thing online" is expected.
4. All cell phones must be charged at home and ready to go. Care of the devices remains in the hands of the student, and the school takes no responsibility for repair or replacement of personal devices if they are damaged/lost or stolen by the students or while in possession by the school.

Consequences:

- 1st Step: The student will be prompted to put the device away.
- 2nd Step: Staff will take the cell phone away until the end of the period.
- 3rd Step: If a student refuses to turn cell phone over to the staff member, then support staff will retrieve the phone and the phone will be kept in the office for the remainder of the day.
- Further offenses or consistent technology misuse: Families and teacher(s)/administration will discuss further steps as needed.

P.E.: We encourage students to wear comfortable clothing and tennis shoes on PE days, as well as have some antiperspirant/deodorant. Students do NOT change clothes for PE due to a lack of time and supervision in the locker rooms.

Transitions and Tardies

Students who arrive after 8:30 will need to check in with Mrs. Combs in the main office.

Students have 4 minutes to move from class to class and are expected to arrive at each class period on time. Students arriving late to class without a pass from another staff member will be marked tardy in Infinite Campus. This data will be used to provide additional support for students, as needed. Any student not in class during their designated class time without the consent of Merrill Staff is considered either tardy, out of bounds, or truant. Students who are tardy to class may receive a referral, a contact home, and/or the loss of school privileges (i.e. school dance, school celebrations, etc.). A consistent pattern of common area loitering or refusal to be in the assigned classroom or space may result in virtual, alternative placement.

Unsafe School Environment

DMPS has chosen to specifically address the most prevalent and disruptive student behaviors that create an unsafe school environment.

1. Fighting: students mutually engaging in offensive physical contact intended to cause injury
2. Common area loitering or refusal to be in an assigned area: students creating an unsafe school environment by refusing to attend class or be in an assigned area, which creates an unsafe school environment
3. Technology use leading to or supporting violence while on school grounds, the uses of technology to increase the level of violence in schools, or recording violent acts while on school grounds for the purpose to exacerbate, recording violent acts while on school grounds without alerting school officials

Students committing any of the behaviors listed above (Items 1-3) may be subject to the following procedures:

1st offense = Parent Meeting and formal Behavioral Contract with supports provided.

2nd offense = 30 school days virtual placement

3rd offense = additional 60 school day virtual placement

4th offense = additional 90 school days virtual placement

*A manifestation determination meeting must be held for students with a disability.

The terms of a placement in an Alternate Educational Placement (AEP) under this required placement section, as well as under Level III, prohibit the student from attending or participating in any school activities.

Restrooms

Students are encouraged to use the restroom before school, during passing periods, and during lunch. For students needing to use the restroom during classroom instruction, students will sign out on the clipboard and take the hall pass/lanyard from the classroom. Gender-neutral restrooms are available on the first floor.

Dress Code and Bags/Backpacks

Dress Code: Students may dress in a way that expresses their gender identity, cultural, and religious beliefs. The following guidelines are meant to assist students and families in determining appropriate attire for school. Students are expected to adhere to reasonable levels of modesty, with a majority of undergarments covered. Students are permitted to wear head wraps, headbands, hats, hoods, and durags as long they allow staff to still recognize students. For engagement and safety reasons, the following items are not allowed: hoods tied so tight that staff can't see faces, sunglasses, slippers, and blankets.

School officials may intervene if the health, safety, or positive educational environment of students is in question.

Backpacks: Students may carry an organizer, a purse, and/or a backpack to class.

Student IDs

As part of the protocols in place to maintain a safe and secure school environment, DMPS is requiring students 6-12th grade to wear their student identification card (ID) when on any school campus and when using school-provided transportation. Having IDs visible will allow students to be identified quickly by staff in order to maintain a safe and orderly environment. Students will need their ID to gain school entry, lunch, school-provided transportation, and entrance to extracurricular events. The ID also provides free access to DART transportation on evenings and weekends.

A lanyard and holder will be provided along with the ID to every student at the beginning of each school year at no cost. Lost or damaged cards can be replaced for \$1.00. A temporary ID may be given to a student while the replacement ID is being printed. The temporary ID will need to be turned in at the time of receiving the new ID.

Food and Water Bottles

To maintain safety and cleanliness, food and drink should only be consumed in the cafeteria during breakfast and lunch hours. Hallways, classrooms and the gymnasium should be free of food and drink items throughout the day.

The following times have been designated as snack times for each grade level:

- 6th Grade: 3rd Period – 10:38 AM (6th lunch is at 12:16 or 12:47)
- 7th Grade: 6th Period – 1:21 PM (7th lunch is at 10:20 or 10:40)
- 8th Grade: 6th Period – 1:21 PM (8th lunch is at 11:10 or 11:40)

To maintain health and safety standards, snacks should be small, individually packaged items not to be shared amongst groups of students.

We encourage students to stay hydrated throughout the day by bringing a water bottle. Water bottles should only contain water.

There is a student vending machine available for students to purchase healthy snacks before and after school only.

Standards Referenced Grading

DMPS is committed to providing fair, accurate, specific, and timely information regarding student progress toward learning goals. Merrill teachers update Infinite Campus grade books at a minimum of every two weeks. To learn more about SRG guiding practices, please click [here](#). Under the “parent” tab you will find a step-by-step guide to navigating the parent portal. Under the “teacher” tab you will find the DMPS SRG Handbook. For additional grading questions, please don’t hesitate to reach out to a specific teacher.

Assessment

Students will participate in a number of surveys and assessments throughout the school year. Click [here](#) to access the DMPS Data and Assessment page which contains testing windows, more information about each individual assessment, etc.

7th Grade Prep Academy:

Prep Academy provides equity of access to accelerated coursework for students in under-represented populations as recognized by the federal government. Students in this program attend Prep Academy for English and Math with a focus on building upon their early readiness for advanced coursework and meeting their social and emotional learning needs. More information regarding 7th Grade Prep Academy can be found [here](#).

As is true every year, the schedules of the home middle schools and Central don't line up perfectly when we take into consideration travel time to and from Central. Below is the plan for Merrill Prep Academy students for the '23-'24 school year.

7th-grade Prep Academy students will attend their morning classes with their peers, including lunch and Mustang Minutes. They will have a short study hall in the library from 11:09-11:30 before departing for Academy on the bus at approximately 11:30 from the west bus turnaround.

While at Prep Academy, students will take both English and Math before returning to Merrill at approximately 1:45. When students return to Merrill, they will stop at their lockers and then head to their 6th-period class. Please be aware that students will miss the first 25 minutes of their 6th period class. We will work with students to make up any opportunities/content missed during those 25 minutes.

There are a few days throughout the year when Prep Academy students stay at Merrill - celebrations and special events, inclement weather, or other circumstances. For these situations, we will help each Academy student identify a “base camp” teacher of their choice where they can work quietly if they don’t attend Central that day.

8th Grade Academy:

The purpose of the 8th Grade Academy program is to meet the needs of students who have demonstrated preparedness for advanced coursework and will respond to academic press that is outside of the school or district norm. Students in this program attend 8th Grade Academy for English and two other core classes based on their needs (Math, Science, or Social Studies). More information regarding 8th Grade Academy can be found [here](#).

Eighth-grade Academy students will board the shuttle bus to Academy at 8:20 each morning. The bus will be located at the west end of the building and will depart promptly at 8:20. We strongly recommend, for safety reasons, that 8th-grade students ride the yellow shuttle bus from Merrill to Academy in the morning. If families of 8th-grade students choose to drop their child off at Academy before school, please keep in mind that doors open at 8:15 and families will not be able to stop curbside on Grand or use the driveway in front of Academy to drop students off.

While at Academy, students will take 3 classes. Please see their Academy schedules to find out which courses they are registered for. Students will return to Merrill at approximately 11:30. Their lunch period at Merrill begins at 11:42.

There are a few days throughout the year when Academy students stay at Merrill - celebrations and special events, inclement weather, or other circumstances. For these situations, we will help each Academy student identify a "base camp" teacher where they can work quietly if they don't attend Central that day.

We are looking forward to the upcoming school year! If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Merrill at 515-242-8448. Thank you for your partnership!

