Below are interesting facts about Oak Park schools dating back to 1900.

1900 – Dancing prohibited at graduation
1901 – School District #1 of Cicero becomes School District #97 of Cook
1902 – Electricity was installed at 64th street school (Julian)
1903 – Committee to rename schools convened
1903 – Corporal punishment requires the permission of the superintendent
1904 – Fire drills established in all two-story buildings
1905 – A phone line was installed in the superintendent’s office
1907 – Schools closed in January for three weeks due to an outbreak of scarlet fever
1914 – Teacher pension system adopted
1918 – Junior high legislation established
1920 – Proof of age required for admittance to school
1928 – Attendance officer employed
1929 – Librarian employed
1931 – Married women could only teach as substitutes
1931 – Budget cut due to depression
1932 – Delay of opening of school due to shortage of funds
1935 – Mandatory retirement set at 68
1939 – Flags placed in every classroom
1942 – Discussion of 48-week school year due to rise in juvenile delinquents
1943 – Federal government moves to freeze wages
1944 – Resident teachers allowed to teach during wartime
1944 – Physical exams required before entry
1945 – 200-day work year established
1946 – 14-year old boys allowed to work through War Labor board
1946 – Unit district with high school considered
1946 – Look Magazine ranks Oak Park Elementary Schools among 100 best in nation
1948 – Supreme Court forbids religious instruction in the schools
1948 – Wednesday early dismissal for curriculum development work introduced
1950 – Marriage no longer deemed cause for dismissal
1955 – Seven member board established (down from nine)
1956 – School Modernization Program underway; purchase of home near schools for expansion
1959 – Full-time secretarial assistants employed at all schools
1960 – Spanish instruction introduced in grades seven and eight
1960 – Enrichment Summer School program offered
1960 – Early Entrance to kindergarten program approved
1961 – Meeting with Oak Park River Forest High School and River Forest district to discuss establishing unit district
1963 – Educational Television Program suggested for instructional use
1965 – Board establishes goal to end meetings no later than 10:30 p.m.
1966 – Proposal to build 11th school introduced
1967 – First discussion to move to junior high model
1967 – Initial discussion of 6-7-8 configuration suggested
1968 – Referendum to build new school due to overcrowding fails
1970 – Referendum for additions at existing schools approved
1971 – Sale of Lowell School (Lake and Forest)
1972 – Board adopts Human Dignity Policy
1973 – Discussion to close schools during coldest months due to energy crisis
1973 – Lunch program established
1974 – Dr. Elsie Harley, first African American principal, hired at Beye Elementary School
1974 – Committee for Tomorrow’s Schools formed
1976 – Board adopts reconfiguration proposal of eight K-6 and two 7-8 schools beginning with 1976-77 school year
1979 – Proposal to sell 970 Madison and 541 Madison introduced
1980 – First Ethnic Festival held
1985 – Hawthorne School renamed Dr. Percy Julian Junior High School
1987 – Playground for All Children at Holmes School receives national acclaim
1987 – Board approves staggered starting times as cost-savings measure
1989 – African American Parents for Purposeful Education (APPLE) group formed
1990 – Adoption of District 97 Strategic Plan and Mission Statement
1991 – Oak Park Education Foundation formed
1991 – Department of Multicultural Education established
1991 – Inclusion Program established
1992 – Smoke-free schools established
1992 – Mentoring Program introduced
1995 – Middle Level Education Steering Committee formed
1995 – District receives Bright Red Apple award placing it among top nine percent of schools in Illinois (has received it every year since then)
1996 – Facilities Study Steering Committee formed
1996 – Board adopts Culture of Achievement
1997 – District 97 website launched
1997 – Promotion Policy introduced
1998 – Board votes to move to K-5, 6-8 configuration
1999 – Referendum to build two new middle schools passes
2001 – In-curricular Spanish instruction for all elementary grades implemented
2002 – Completion of two new middle schools August 2002
2002 – Change of Emerson to Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School
2007 – District adopts comprehensive five-year strategic plan
2009 – Full-day kindergarten program implemented district wide
2011 – Voters of Oak Park approved limiting rate increase
2011 – Summer capital projects include addition and secured entrance at Lincoln Elementary School and secured entrance at Longfellow Elementary School
2011 – District launches redesigned family of websites
2011 – Successful passage of the first operating rate referendum the district has sought in more than 20 years
2012 – District implements Project Lead the Way at its two middle schools, which is a project-based, middle school design program that introduces students to elements of science, technology, engineering and math
2012 – District replaces outdated classroom furniture at Beye Elementary School during the summer
2012 – District completes upgrades to schoolyards at Beye, Holmes and Longfellow elementary schools
2013 – District is selected as one of 64 districts from across the state that is partnering with the Illinois State Board of Education on the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey (KIDS), which is a pilot program to assess the school readiness of individual kindergarten students and identify gaps in development
2013 – District 97, District 200 and the Village of Oak Park approve an intergovernmental agreement for the purchase of services pertaining to early childhood education, as well as a contract for early childhood education services; actions were taken in support of the Collaboration for Early Childhood’s vision of creating a comprehensive, integrated early childhood system in Oak Park
2013 – District completes upgrades to schoolyards at Hatch, Irving, Mann and Whittier elementary schools

2013 – District replaces outdated classroom furniture at Hatch, Lincoln and Mann elementary schools during the summer

2013 – District introduces new elementary school report card that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards

2014 – District launches iLearn 97 technology initiative in January

2014 – District undertakes temperature control pilot in an effort to identify potential solutions for temperature and humidity-related issues in its schools

2014 – District performs work during the summer to improve accessibility at several elementary schools, including installing an elevator at Whittier Elementary School

2014 – District completes upgrades to the green space at Brooks and Julian middle schools

2014 – District replaces outdated classroom furniture at Holmes, Irving, Longfellow and Whittier elementary schools during the summer