



# Gwendolyn Brooks Elementary

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Dave Younce, Principal

## An Important Note from Brooks Elementary Regarding School Schedule and Homework

### *2009-2010 Schedule - Wednesdays*

District 204 is adjusting the starting time for students on Wednesday morning for the 2009-10 school year. We believe this change will benefit our students through providing school-wide professional development opportunities for our teachers. The later start on Wednesday provides teachers with time to collaboratively review and better examine student performance, instructional methods, and curricular initiatives – each of which is proven to translate to higher student achievement. This common professional learning time allows teachers to monitor student progress more frequently and collaborate to determine the best instructional methods for our students. The later start also allows the district to establish school-wide training each week that emphasizes a greater amount of continuity and focus on student learning. This school-wide focus will be linked directly to each school's improvement plan – which means that over time the results will be tangible and measurable.

Each Wednesday morning, our teachers will arrive at school earlier to begin professional learning activities. The start of the school day will be adjusted slightly on Wednesday mornings to accommodate this program while the end of the school day will remain unchanged. Details for each level are as follows:

**Elementary School Staff: 8:00 am**

**Elementary School Students: 9:15 am**

*Middle School Staff: 7:30 am*

*Middle School Students: 8:20 am*

*High School Staff: 6:55 am*

*High School Students: 7:45 am*

We are assisting elementary parents who might not have flexibility in their morning schedules. Elementary school parents unable to make the 10 minute adjustment on Wednesdays will be permitted to drop off their students at the same time as other school days, and supervision will be provided for those additional 10 minutes. Students who arrive at 8:50 will participate in a study hall and will need to either bring a book or homework to work on quietly during this time. If you feel that your child will need to be dropped off at school at 8:50 on Wednesdays due to a scheduling hardship, please contact [dave\\_younce@ipeds.org](mailto:dave_younce@ipeds.org) with specific student details so that we can plan accordingly.

### *Information Regarding Homework Statement for 2009-2010*

As you read through copies of the Brooks Student-Parent Handbook (will be posted online in early August) you will note that District 204 has adopted a new statement in accordance with our current policy as it relates to homework at the elementary level. What follows are the history, research, and practical application behind the new statement.

During the course of the 2008-2009 school year, the District 204 elementary school principals conducted an in-depth study on the topic of homework in order to guarantee that the district was current with best practices. Several interesting results were found. They included:

- The focus on the purpose of homework should be student learning and not compliance. Teachers know that certain learning skills require practice to perfect, and often homework is used for practice. Research confirms that mastering a skill requires focused practice (Marzano et. al, 2001.)

- Research does seem to verify that a small amount of homework may be good for learning, but too much homework may be bad for learning. Up to a point, homework appears positive, but past the optimal amount, achievement either remains flat or declines. Curiously, the research about the appropriate amount of homework for different grade levels is already consistent with an informal guideline that many teachers already practice – the “ten minute” rule (Cooper, 2007.)
- All homework can be used to check for understanding if we convince students not to be threatened by grades. Grades are not necessary for learning to take place. Grades on homework often get in the way of learning, demotivate students, and create power struggles between students and teachers and between students and parents (Guskey, 2003).
- The goal of assessment of learning should be to keep failure at a minimum and to maintain learner’s confidence – the opposite occurs when homework is graded. The most important question to ask about grading homework is “What is the effect on future learning?” (Stiggins, 2007.) Priority must be given to tasks that do not cause students to give up.
- All homework should receive feedback. Moving from grading to feedback encourages student ownership of learning. Allowing students to take control of their learning makes learning personal (Guskey and Anderson, 2008.)

As a result of these findings, the principals, with input from teachers, revised the District #204 homework statement in order to confirm that reasonable time-limited homework, which provides feedback to our students, is still important to the learning process. With this new statement, homework will continue to be a part of the learning process for students. It will be valued and a part of the expectation for learning. The practice that homework provides is a key to the learning process, and experience shows that most students will not receive good grades if they do not practice. However, homework will not be graded and factored into the grades that a student receives on progress reports or report cards.

Student grades will be determined from the skills and learning that are demonstrated at school. Our teachers have and will continue to assess student performance and learning individually. Appropriate feedback for homework will be provided to ensure that students value the practice and participate in the learning activities associated with the classroom. We will revisit this conversation in each classroom during our fall curriculum night, held at the beginning of the school year. Each teacher will be able to provide you with a realistic understanding of what homework, assessment and grading will look like in the classroom.

### **Homework Tips for Parents**

Facilitating the learning of your child is the primary focus of the District #204 elementary staff. As a result, we understand the importance of an ongoing partnership with our parents and students as they attempt schoolwork at home. The following guidelines and tips are offered to assist you and your child to be successful (Vatterot, 2009) (Pandur, 2005) :

#### **Parents are encouraged to .....**

- Ask your children what they are studying in school.
- Ask your child to show you homework assignments.
- Assist your child in organizing homework materials.
- Help your child formulate a plan for completing homework.
- Provide an appropriate space for your child to do homework.

#### **Parents may if they wish.....**

- Help your child interpret assignment directions.
- Proof read your child’s work, pointing out errors.
- Read aloud required reading to your child.
- Give practice quizzes to your child to help prepare for tests.
- Help your child brainstorm ideas for papers or projects.
- Praise your child for completing homework.

#### **Parents should not.....**

- Attempt to teach your child concepts or skills the child is unfamiliar with.
- Complete assignments for your child.
- Allow your child to sacrifice sleep to complete homework.

#### **Contact the teacher if.....**

- Your child refuses to do the assignment
- Instructions for the assignment are unclear
- Your child can’t get organized to finish the assignment
- You can’t provide the materials or supplies necessary to complete the assignment
- Neither you nor your child understand the purpose of the assignment