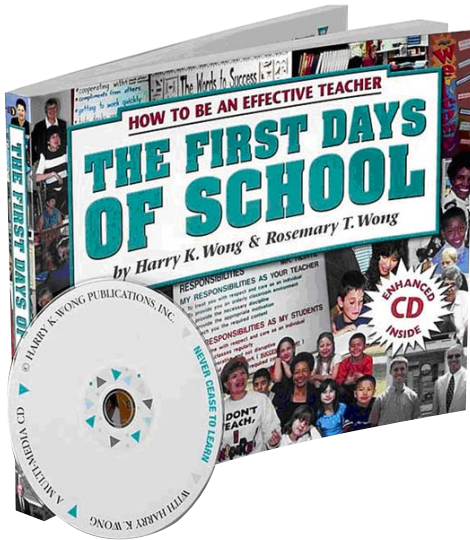


Correlation to *The First Days of School*



This course is based on the information from our book, *The First Days of School*. You should have a copy of it at your side as you work through the lessons.

Please read the pages, chapters, or units listed below to complete your understanding of the concepts and ideas presented.

You will find many of the pages listed as correlated readings in other lessons, as well. We encourage you to revisit these pages for a richer understanding of the material.

The First Days of School:

Pages 10, 30, 82, 84, 133, and 169

Chapters 8, 13, 14, and 15

Copies of *The First Days of School* are available at all leading bookstores and from www.EffectiveTeaching.com.

3-11: Use a Daily Agenda to Organize Your Students

How to Help Students with Their Assignments



Carol Brooks and her
SWOOSH binder

There were the complaints from the teachers: The students don't do their homework. How am I supposed to teach when they do not come prepared? The students lose everything I give them. They never bring their materials—no pencils, no papers, and no signed papers!

It's pretty clear why many students are not doing well in school. They just aren't turning in their assignments or coming to class prepared.

This is because no one has ever taught them how to organize their time and work. Students who do not do their work are not unintelligent, lazy, or irresponsible. True, some students may come from dysfunctional homes—homes where the family is not functioning well. The students have no knowledge or skill in having procedures that beget success.

On the other hand, we have students who come from functioning homes and they do not do their work either. Or, they are trying to juggle so much, that they only do whatever may accidentally surface. Students belong to that carefree age where there are no adult responsibilities and they live a life where adults take care of their needs: food, shelter, finances, and love. What a life, but that's of no help to a teacher who wants the work done!

Take a look at a child's room at home and if it's a typical child's room, it is a mess. The floor is where they "hang" their clothes; the closet is where they "place" their books; and the presence of a calendar or schedule of their work is nowhere to be found.

Possibly the Most Important Skill in Life

If you plan to learn, you MUST learn to plan!

Just as the teacher needs to be organized, the teacher needs to help the students to be organized. Teachers who are not organized do not have any concept of the need for the students to be organized, too.

This article is correlated to
Chapter 17
in *The First Days of School*.

Effective teachers are organized and have the following on the first day of school:

- A first day of school script
- An action plan
- Classroom management procedures
- Lesson plans
- Housekeeping procedures, such as grade record book, letters to parents, attendance records, safety plans, and information for emergencies.

Also, effective teachers have procedures to help students stay organized.

Getting organized does not mean becoming neat and clean. It's not about how things look; it's about keeping a schedule, knowing where things are, and making your time and space work for you.

The result is less chaos; you get things done, and even have time to enjoy life. Staying organized is everyone's problem, from the company executive, homemaker, to the underachieving student. This is why there is such a market for Day-Timers® and Palm® organizers.

Being organized, knowing what you are doing, and getting the work done is possibly the most important skill for everyone in adult life. Being organized is a skill students need to start developing in school.

The Key Is a One-Page Agenda

After teaching for over ten years, Carol Brooks, a middle school teacher in South Carolina, came up with a solution to the problem of student organization. In time, her classes of underachieving students were doing so well that the parents, who didn't even know what she was doing, were asking for what their neighbors were "screaming" for, "Get my kid into that notebook class!"

Brooks gives each of her inclusion students at Palmetto Middle School in Williamston, South Carolina, a three-ring binder or notebook. She noticed the students were always flipping through science, social studies, math, English, whatever. So, she took construction paper and made blue one subject, yellow one subject, red . . . and made themselves dividers.

The notebook is divided into sections with colored dividers, one for each class to keep the class work.

The key to the system is a one-page agenda with blank squares for every period, every class, and every day.

Students, parents, and teachers can take one look and tell what is being or needs to be done.

Because many of her students have developed bad study habits, she is relentless in having them write down everything that they are to do, everything that's expected, and every homework assignment from every teacher. She is relentless in seeing that they get every assignment from every teacher. If they are absent, she is relentless in having them come back in the next day and write down what they missed. This is a way of teaching them to be responsible when they're out.

The students are to have every assignment from every teacher written down in the agenda. It's unacceptable to write, "No homework." They have to write what they were doing that day. Were they dissecting frogs? Were they talking about the history of ancient Egypt? Were they talking about paragraph structure? We were discussing how to do fractions.

With students on an Academic Assistance Plan (AAP), parents are required to sign the agenda each day as well. It's an effective communication tool between the parents and their children. The parents like to see what their child is learning or what their child needs to do, such as studying for a test.

She Calls Her Plan SWOOSH

Carol Brooks calls her planning system SWOOSH (School-Wide Optimal Organizational Student Handbook).

Ignore what SWOOSH stands for, but know that for every hyperactive middle school kid who knows a bit about sports, they know the word SWOOSH. SWOOSH occurs when you shoot a basketball and it goes through the hoop cleanly, touching only the net below the hoop, making a SWOOSH sound. When this happens, teammates high-five each other and yell, "SWOOSH!" SWOOSH is a sense of accomplishment!

The SWOOSH notebook has the following components:

Notebook: The notebook holds the component parts. A student is to bring the SWOOSH notebook, textbook, and related materials to all classes. Book bags are not allowed in the classroom.

Plastic pouch: This holds pencils, pens, rulers, and other school related supplies.

Dividers: There is one for each class, each a different color for quick reference. The respective class syllabus goes here, too.

Agenda: This is the heart of the plan. On one page, all assignments are kept for every class for every day in a month.

Game Plan: In a clear plastic protector, class schedules and calendars are kept.

SWOOSH Attack Sheets: This is what the teacher uses to periodically check the notebooks for organization and the agendas for completeness. Fouls are given if the agendas are not complete.

Carol Brooks has an amazingly simple, yet effective, plan for assisting student achievement. The only thing the students have to carry to all of their classes is the SWOOSH notebook. Everything that they do is in this notebook. The only things the parents have to buy are notebook paper and pencils. And if they don't have those, Brooks will supply them.

Every student has the same notebook set up the same way and they are taught how to maintain the notebook. Kids will not plan if you don't teach them how. Somebody needs to take the time to teach them to plan and to learn to use the notebook as a great planning tool. From the basic plan, they can plan their book reports, science fairs, and rehearsals for the week and the month.

It takes a student 5 to 15 minutes each day to bring the agenda up to date. Brooks says that the more they get used to it, the better they are at it. For those 5 to 15 minutes each day, you are getting organized, responsible kids. It's definitely worth it.

Checking the Agenda Page

The parents are required to check and sign off the one-page agenda each day. Brooks says that it's a great tool for parent communication. The children can't say, "We didn't do anything today." A parent can easily see what is scheduled and say, "Well, it says here you have a test on Thursday and you got your study guide today. Let's start studying."

Brooks checks and initials the agenda every day. It's easy to check as it's only one page. All she has to do is look to see if any of the agenda blocks are blank. If there is a blank, the student is given a "FOUL." Fouls are not regarded as punishments, because kids readily accept the concept of fouls in a game.

Those students who have the fewest fouls are given a reward, which could be permission to go to a SWOOSH dance. Other rewards have included basketballs, jump ropes, board games, Play Stations, Game Boys, music, and more! Students who have worked for weeks keeping up with their SWOOSH notebooks and assignments earn their reward.

The students are responsible for checking their own agendas. The agenda page says, “All agenda blocks must be complete.” They write how many fouls that they have for each blank square.

Every Monday they check the previous week’s agenda. The first thing they have to look for are any blank agenda blocks. The words “not here,” “out today,” “did nothing,” “no homework,” are fouls.

Students perform weekly peer *SWOOSH* Attacks or notebook shakedowns to monitor whether students are conforming to the rules of the game. These rules include filling in each section of the agendas with assignments and making sure that all pages are securely placed in the appropriate sections.

Using the Agenda to Prepare a Portfolio

Brooks teaches her students how to organize, plan, and goal set. She then holds them accountable. All she needs to see if a student is accountable is the one-page agenda. The kids are totally responsible for maintaining this one sheet of paper, not the teacher.

And Brooks loves not having tons of paperwork. The kids are doing all the work.

The students use the agenda to create their very own working portfolios.

PASS: Portfolio Assessment for Successful Students

- At the end of the nine-week grading period, students will staple the pages from each section/subject.
- They will also include the *SWOOSH* Attack sheets as a record of their organizational habits.
- All material from the quarter will be placed in a 9" x 12" envelope.
- Homeroom teachers will maintain these portfolios for each student.
- Portfolios will be used as documentation of assessment for the grading period. These are extremely useful in conferences.

To prepare the portfolio, every sheet of paper has to have the student’s name, the date, and the topic. If it’s a stapled packet of pages, then the information is just listed on the top sheet of paper. Each week during the nine-week period, the students go through every sheet of paper. **This keeps all the pages in the correct section.** Science must be with science, and math has to be with math.

Brooks says, "These kids have somebody holding them accountable and teaching them how to organize, plan, and goal set. We’re not

telling them what to do; we’re showing them how to do it. We’re giving them the tools that they need to succeed. So this is all that every kid has to have to succeed."

The Parents Comment

Dear Mrs. Brooks,

I understand that you are responsible for the *SWOOSH* notebooks that the students used last year and will use again this year. I would like to commend you on your idea that has helped greatly with my two children. Both of my children are students at Palmetto Middle School. They are both very different in their style of learning and their organizational skills. My older child has always been very organized and has always kept things very neat and orderly, as my younger child has always been the complete opposite.

I can say that the notebook has helped each of them greatly. My organized child felt such a relief that she didn’t have to carry around a different notebook for each class. She has really enjoyed being able to have all other notes together. My younger child now has to be organized, and I’m assured as a parent that he has all of the notes that he needs for each class.

It the beginning of last year, I was thrilled that the notebook saved me lots of money for school supplies. I am now thrilled that my children are being taught the importance of organization.

Thanks again.

The Students Comment

The notebook organizer has helped me make good in class. Last year in 5th grade I was making Ds and Fs. Now in 6th grade I am making As, Bs, and Cs.

I think the planner has helped me. I am so proud of my grades and, most of all, my mother is proud of me.

That is why I think we should have the notebook shakedown.

Jason F.

The Students Are Learning

Brooks is proud that her test scores are some of the highest in the state. The principal bought into the plan right away and it is now used by the entire school.

The *SWOOSH* plan was ignited by a concern for student achievement, fueled by concerns from parents about the rising cost of supplies, and driven by the teachers’ efforts to ensure student success. After a very successful pilot, which targeted the inclusion/special needs students, the program was expanded, developed further, and implemented school-wide.

SWOOSH has been shown to increase student achievement in a number of ways. Expectations for organization are consistently communicated and reinforced through a school-wide incentive plan. Students enter class more prepared to learn and leave with the tools necessary for extended learning beyond the classroom. The planning system ensures optimal organization. *SWOOSH* enables long range planning for tests, quizzes, and other assignments. Students learn organizational skills that will transfer throughout their educational and future workplace careers.

The object is simply to give the students a plan with the tools they need to succeed. The belief is that if you can teach the kids how to plan and set goals, then they can and will succeed.

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The Object Is to Plan

Organization does not just happen. It is a methodical process with details thought through to the minutest detail. By taking the time now to think through your plan for the coming year, you will be providing your students with a skill they'll carry with them possibly throughout their lifetime.

The joy of organization is the reward of more time for yourself, for your family, for your business, or for your pleasure. Time is the resource we most long for. Get yourself and your students organized and experience the gift of time.