

Keeping Track of Assignments

Carol Brooks of South Carolina has developed a daily method to help students keep track of their assignments. Read about it in the **Going Beyond** folder for Chapter 24 at EffectiveTeaching.com.

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 were asking about what their neighbors were “screaming” for, “Get my kid into that notebook class!”

The notebook the parents refer to is a three-ring binder Carol uses to teach her students how to organize all of their class assignments.

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 notebook. Everything they do is in this notebook. The only things their 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 all taught how to maintain it. Carol teaches them to use the notebook as a great weekly and monthly basic planning tool, and to expand its use for scheduling everything from book reports to science fairs to band rehearsals.

It takes a student 5 to 15 minutes each day to bring the agenda up to date. Brooks says the more they get used to it, the better they are at using it. For those 5 to 15 minutes each day, kids become better organized and more responsible.

The Key to the System

The key to the system is a one-page agenda with blank squares for every period, every class, and every day. She calls the plan “SWOOSH.”

[Click here](#) to see this agenda.

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

Because many of her students have developed bad study habits, she is relentless in having them write down everything they are expected to do, including every homework assignment from every teacher. She is also relentless in verifying that they get every assignment from every teacher. If they are absent, she has them come back in the next day and write down what they missed. This teaches 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 learning about paragraph structure? Were they discussing how to calculate fractions?

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."

The students are responsible for checking their own agendas. The agenda page states, "All agenda blocks must be complete." Brooks checks and initials the agenda every day. It's easy to check because it's only one page. **All she has to do is look to see if any of the agenda blocks are blank.**

Teaching Accountability

Brooks teaches her students how to organize, plan, and set goals. She then holds them accountable, based on the one-page agenda. The kids are totally responsible for maintaining this one sheet of paper.

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

Brooks says, "We're not telling them what to do; we're showing them how to do it. We're giving them the tools they need to succeed. So this is all that every kid has to have to succeed."

One of her students, Jason, comments, "The notebook organizer has helped me make good grades in class. Last year in fifth grade I was making Ds and Fs. Now in sixth 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."

The Students Are Learning

Brooks is proud that her students' 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.

Students enter class more prepared to learn and they leave with the tools necessary for extended learning beyond the classroom. 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.

For more information on her SWOOSH plan, contact Carol at carolmartinbrooks@yahoo.com