

Frequently Asked Questions about the Breton Downs Playground

1. Why did Breton Downs adopt a new playground initiative?

Last school year, Mrs. Wendy VanZegeren, former Breton Downs Principal, and our School Climate and Culture Committee, researched and developed the initiative as a result of ongoing playground concerns. Issues occurring on the playground were having a direct impact on the classroom instructional time. The committee analyzed behavior data collected throughout the year, used information from a student survey, and identified playground concerns. Staff members also attended workshops developed by Dr. Curt Hinson and worked on possible playground changes for implementation this year. In the spring, some students were taught different playground games and teachers had classroom discussions about the new changes. This fall, through the support of the Breton Downs PTA, Dr. Hinson presented to staff and parents and spent a full day teaching the games to our students.

2. Why weren't parents asked before the playground initiative happened?

The Breton Downs staff has been working on this school improvement goal for two years due to behavioral issues on the playground. This is the same course of action that would take place if there were curriculum issues that needed to be addressed. The staff comes together, studies the issues, and determines the best course of action for all students.

3. What were the results of the survey given to students?

The results of the survey given to students during the 2008-2009 school year indicated that 85% of our students felt safe on the playground only some of the time; and 15% of our students felt safe on the playground all of the time.

4. Are kids able to play the traditional games such as basketball, football, soccer, and kickball?

Yes, students are playing basketball, football, soccer, and kickball. Actually, they have more choices this year such as field games, hula hoops, jump ropes, play structure, tire swing, imaginary play, sidewalk chalk, Grab It, Guard the Cookie Jar, and West African Jumping.

5. How can you teach these games in a different way?

With the new system, the size of the group is reduced, students have more time playing, and more students are involved. On our big field we have three football fields and five soccer fields.

6. Are we trying to get rid of competition?

No; competition exists; however, our goal on the playground is to make competitive games cooperative for all students.

7. Are students allowed to keep score?

Yes, students are allowed to keep score.

8. Are there winners and losers?

Yes, we understand there will be winners and losers; however, our emphasis is on recess being an extension of the classroom where productive learning can take place. It is about more students participating in a cooperative environment; however, there will still be winners and losers.

9. Are students allowed free choice at Breton Downs?

Yes, we actually have more game choices this year than we have had in years past. Students can still play games such as football, basketball, soccer, kickball, and imaginary play. In addition, they also have the opportunity to play some of the new games such as West African Jumping, Keep Away, or Grab It. Students continue to have the opportunity to form teams themselves, keep score, and be competitive. The play structure and tire swing are always filled with students laughing and enjoying themselves.

10. Is imaginary play allowed on the playground?

Yes, we encourage students to choose from a variety of activities during recess including imaginary play.

11. Why doesn't Breton Downs stagger the recess times like Lakeside Elementary and Wealthy Elementary?

Breton Downs, along with Lakeside and Wealthy, staggers lunchtime recess. The morning and afternoon recess in all elementary buildings are not staggered due to many issues including music, art, and physical education schedules and instructional time.

12. Why aren't Lakeside Elementary and Wealthy Elementary doing this?

Each school building in the district establishes its own school improvement goals based on what is considered necessary to continue a positive learning environment in that particular building.

13. Are kids organizing their own teams or are the playground supervisors forming the teams?

Students are forming their own teams but, if they need assistance, the playground supervisors are willing to help them.

14. Are the students playing in "stations"?

No, students are not playing in stations. Students are able to choose from a variety of activities on the playground and are able to participate in them when they want.

15. Are the students responsible for picking up the playground equipment?

Yes, it has always been our practice to ask our students to be responsible picking up any playground equipment they are using.

16. Has there been flexibility in the playground initiative?

Yes, adjustments have been made since the beginning of the school year and we will continue to make modifications as necessary. For example, in some games, we have increased the amount of players to five per team to ensure that more students are able to participate. We have provided additional playground equipment to increase the number of games available. Also, staff members have been on hand to assist students in forming smaller teams as they adjust to the new format.

17. How are the students responding to the new playground?

Students have responded well to the new playground initiative. As a staff, we are monitoring and making adjustments along the way.

18. How are students providing feedback?

There have been classroom discussions between students and staff focused on the new playground initiative.

19. How has this new initiative affected behavior incidents?

The discipline data that we have collected so far this school year indicates that behavioral incidents during recess have been reduced by half as a result of implementing this program.

20. Are there additional playground supervisors this year?

No, we do not have additional playground supervisors.

21. Does this playground initiative discriminate against boys?

The program does not discriminate against any individual or group and, in fact, promotes safe and healthy play among more students.

22. If I have any additional questions, whom should I contact?

Please contact Caroline Breault-Cannon, Principal of Breton Downs Elementary at ccannon@egrps.org or 235-7552.