



Brown International “State of the School” Address January 2009

Dear Friends,

Over the past month we have had the opportunity to listen to our new president’s Inaugural Address, as well as the governor’s “State of the State” address. As Brown’s principal for the past three and a half years, I would like to provide you with Brown’s 2009 State of the School Address. I will recap our journey as a “redesigned” school in DPS, which began in August 2005.

As a DPS “redesigned” school many aspects of Brown’s design and curriculum are different from previous years. In 2005-2006 a new high caliber, committed, enthusiastic and collaborative staff was hired and created a vision for Brown International Elementary School. In our first year we inventoried and analyzed the existing curriculum and instructional resources, studied successful research-based core curriculum resources for teaching reading, writing and language development. Core instructional materials were selected, ordered and ready for use in the spring. During the 06-07 school years the internal Leadership Team and Collaborative School Committee (including parent representatives) developed and submitted to DPS a *Beacon School Plan* defining the vision and a long range strategic plan for Brown. This plan is based upon current research and best practices in the field of Education and is available for your review on the DPS website. Our *Beacon School Plan* was approved by the DPS School Board in the spring of 2007.

International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program

The Revitalization Committee formed in 2005 and charged with studying the state of the school and making recommendations for the future of Brown Elementary, identified the International Baccalaureate Primary Years program (PYP) as a key to the schools future success. Training the newly hired staff in the IB Primary Years Program began in the summer of 2005 at Princeton University, and continues on an annual basis. All six Units of Inquiry for each grade level have been developed and form the core of your childrens’ transdisciplinary studies. These units incorporate Science, Social Studies (History & Geography) state standards; they also incorporate Literacy and the Arts. Following three years of staff training and curriculum design Brown submitted Application B to the International Baccalaureate Organization.

This September an IB Authorization Team of site visitors was sent to Brown charged with assessing the current level of PYP implementation and to make recommendations to the International Baccalaureate Organization. The site visitors spent two days visiting classroom, reviewing our curriculum and interviewing school and district staff, students and community members. Their report was forwarded to IBNA office in New York and the international headquarters in Cardiff, Wales. We are pleased to announce that Brown International has been officially designated an *International Baccalaureate World School*, one of 523 PYP Schools in the world. This is an honor and significant accomplishment for the Brown International community and a testament to the hard work and commitment of our staff, parents, students and community partners.

Measuring Brown Students Performance and Improvement

Our major core curriculum improvement efforts over the past three years have focused on the design and implementation of a guaranteed viable reading curriculum and the identification and implementation of a systematic writing curriculum. Tracking continuously enrolled students (Grades 3-5) at Brown from the redesign in 05-06 through spring 2008, as measured by the Colorado State Assessment program (CSAP), reflects an 18% increase in Reading performance (from 59% proficient or above in 2006 to 77% proficient or above in 2008). Student achievement in Writing has improved an impressive 27% (from 32% proficient or above in 2006 to 59% proficient or above in 2008), and a 10% improvement in Math achievement (from 45% proficient or above in 2006 to 55% proficient or above in 2008). National research focused on the impact of improvement efforts in redesigned schools, indicates that significant improvement is typically not witnessed in standardized tests until year five of a multiple year improvement initiative.

In the 06-07 school year, we initiated implementation of a systematic writing program (*Writing Alive*), and are currently engaged in the second year of an in-depth job embedded staff development program, supporting the successful implementation of the *Writing Alive* Program. As a result of Brown's observable improvement in student writing performance, four additional DPS elementary schools initiated implementation of the *Writing Alive* Program this year. We expect continued improvement in student writing achievement as a result of continued staff development in this successful program. We have also initiated staff training in a six step research based vocabulary development process, to be integrated throughout the curriculum.

In 2007-2008 we initiated implementation of the computer based *Larson* (K-2) and *I Succeed* Math Programs to support the *Everyday Math* Program in the area of basic computation, and to provide Tier II intervention resources for students needing additional support and/or accelerated math opportunities for students needing more challenge in Mathematics. This program is also available to students in before school classes offered daily in our computer lab. For the 2008-2009 school year, Math is a major area of focus for improvement. A half-time Math Intervention teacher was hired in November (funds were granted in October after the official count day reveal increased enrollment at Brown) to serve 3rd – 5th grade students needing focused intervention to achieve proficient status in math achievement. The *Number Worlds* Program was selected and purchased as a Tier 2 Math intervention program to support students in achieving proficient status in Math achievement. We expect continued growth following full implementation of *Larson* and *I Succeed* and *Number Worlds* math programs and the new support of a Math Intervention teacher.

In addition to annual CSAP testing, the state and federal accountability systems, School Accountability Report (SAR) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), are the primary measures of school performance in Colorado. The purpose of these accountability systems is described below.

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

You have probably recently received a letter informing you of our schools success in meeting 2008 "Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)," as defined by federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation. AYP is a federal accountability measure for schools, districts and states. One of the major goals of *No Child Left Behind* is for all students in public schools (including identified special education students) to demonstrate proficient (grade level) status in reading and math by 2014. AYP measures the progress districts are making towards reaching this goal. While Brown did not formally achieve AYP, we are extremely proud to announce that we met all 22 Reading Targets, and 9 of the 13 Math targets.

To make AYP, a school like ours must meet assessment participation and performance targets in reading and math for all applicable subgroups of children in the district. These subgroups include: American Indian, African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and White, students with disabilities, low income students, and English language learners. Schools and districts have several general targets for each of the student groups specified in the law. The targets are:

- Performance on CSAP reading and math in terms of the percentage of students scoring at the partially proficient level or higher
- A 95% participation rate in CSAP testing
- Other targets: 1% of students in each subgroup (including special education) must score at the advanced level in reading and math

This means that elementary and middle schools could have up to 54 targets and high schools could have 45 targets. Districts could have up to 153 targets to meet in order to make AYP. The number of targets will vary because there must be at least 30 students in a subgroup in order for results to be reported.

Every three years, the performance targets increase so that by 2014 the target will be 100 percent of students in U.S. public schools scoring proficient. 2008 was a year that the targets for AYP were increased 6% in both Reading and Math. While a district and/or school may have shown growth across the board in reading and math, that district or school may not have made AYP because one individual subgroup as previously defined did not meet the target and/or because the target increased this year. A review of school districts across the nation since the inception of AYP reveals that large urban school districts such as Denver, Cherry Creek and Jefferson County etc. cannot meet AYP targets the way the law is currently written. This occurs because if just one target is not met the district or individual school does not make AYP. In business, achieving 95% of ones organizational goals is applauded and celebrated. In schools 95% student success on a learning goal or test yields an "A" grade. Unfortunately in *No Child Left Behind* legislation, 95% is treated as a failing grade. Districts and schools that meet all but one of their targets and those that miss all of their targets have the same status under the law – they fail to make AYP.

School Accountability Report

The State Accountability Report card assigns a grade to schools based upon the performance of third, fourth and fifth grade students attending the school during the annual spring Colorado State Assessment (CSAP) testing time block. These students may or may not have attended Brown the previous year. The annual SAR ranking is determined by the scores of the group of students taking the test the previous spring and "growth" is determined by comparing the scores of different groups of students from year to year, not by tracking the growth of the same group of students over time. It is also important to remember that the ranking in the School Accountability Report is based solely on a school's CSAP results. Just a single letter grade for all of your child's classes (or subjects) would not present a complete picture of his or her abilities. A single ranking for an entire school also fails to tell the whole story. Despite weaknesses in this reporting system, we are very proud of the "Significant Improvement" rank achieved in the 05-06 school year, and our continued growth towards a higher rating from 05-08.

School Performance Framework (SPF)

Although the state and federal accountability systems, School Accountability Report (SAR) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), are the primary measures of school performance in Colorado, these measures alone do not provide a true picture of a school's performance as they only capture student performance at a given point in time (status) and do not account for the progress made over time (growth). Unlike SAR and AYP, the School Performance Framework (SPF) takes into account a broad range of measures, including the school's SAR and CSAP ratings in a given year, but also demonstrated improvement from one year to the next. It is these measures of growth over time that provide a more informative view of the school's record of increasing student achievement.

The School Performance Framework (SPF) is a comprehensive annual review of school performance which is presented in the form of a scorecard that measures multiple performance criteria including growth, status, college and career readiness, student engagement, school demand, and parent and community engagement. It was created as a means of accrediting our schools as required by the Colorado Department of Education, but also as a way to give the district and the school the information they need to make critical instructional decisions that will have the greatest impact on improving student achievement. Based upon the school's total number of points achieved across all of the indicators, the school is assigned an overall SPF rating of: Exceeds Standard, Meets Standard, Approaching Standard, or Does Not Meet Standard. We are pleased to announce that Brown International achieved a "Meets Standard" rating for the first year (2008) of the School Performance Framework.

Brown's Perspective on External Performance Measures

The staff and Collaborative School Committee at Brown views AYP and SAR data as a small piece of information necessary to monitor student growth and evaluate the success of our instructional programs. With the implementation of the School Performance Framework we have a performance measure more appropriately focused on student growth overtime and data that enables us to more accurately assess the impact and value added to student growth resulting from our school improvement efforts within the school. Additionally, student growth data collected on an ongoing basis throughout the year via assessments such as the districts benchmark tests, DRA2 (Development Reading Assessment), DIBELS, STAR Early Literacy, Accelerated Reader growth assessments, and curriculum based assessments such as Everyday Math pre and post tests, provide more accurate and helpful data which informs our daily instructional decisions and gives us feedback related to the appropriateness of our curriculum.

As a staff, we collaboratively analyze student growth in reading, writing and math in weekly Data Team meetings. In these meetings we identify areas of relative student weakness and develop plans for aligning curriculum and instruction to identified student needs as defined by Colorado State Standards. As a result of the aforementioned improvement efforts, as well as the additional staff development and improvement plans outlined in our *Beacon School Plan*, we anticipate continuous growth and improvement in student achievement.

We recognize that the pressure for high test scores seems to accompany the increasing speed and competitiveness of American society. Recalling Mahatma Gandis's advice: "there is more to life than simply increasing speed," reminds us as parents and educators that there is more to school life than high test scores. In fact research from the Search Institute delineates the factors that promote positive youth development. In addition to the developmental assets promoted by families and schools, the staff at Brown acknowledges the value and importance of modeling and teaching the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the development of well rounded, compassionate contributing citizens of the world. As an IB PYP School we are committed to modeling, teaching and recognizing students for demonstrating the IB attitudes: respect, empathy, commitment, tolerance, confidence, and enthusiasm. I have attached a copy of the developmental assets and IB attitudes to help us all maintain a balanced perspective about what our children need to develop into healthy, happy, productive and contributing young men and women. Let's make sure they have opportunities to continue to blow bubbles and celebrate the joy of learning.

In alignment with President Obama's call for a new spirit of service and responsibility, your involvement in your child's education is key to their success in school and in life. Some ways you can support your child include:

1. Provide a routine time and place for completion of homework and encourage your child to read daily for 30 minutes to an hour. Support the school and teacher's expectations and communicate with your child's teachers on a regular basis.
2. Model and reinforce your children's efforts to live the IB attitudes and practice them both in school and in life.
3. Become involved in the school by participating in the PTO/BPAC Committee, Collaborative School Committee, or by volunteering in your child's classroom or the Media Center.
4. Ensure that your child attends school regularly and arrives at school on time (8:50). Avoid picking students up prior to the official end of the school day (instruction does not end until 3:40). Every minute of teaching and learning counts!

We value all of our families and recognize that great discoveries and achievements invariably involve the cooperation of many hearts and minds. Thank you for partnering with us to build an extraordinary neighborhood school.

If you have any questions regarding the information provided in this letter, please feel free to call me or schedule a conversation.

Respectfully,

Suzanne Loughran
Principal