

September 2009

Dear Families,

Over the course of the summer, teachers in second, third, fourth, and fifth grade participated in a week long seminar for Responsive Classroom. Responsive Classroom is a new approach to the district for the 2009-2010 school year which emphasizes social, emotional, and academic growth in a strong and safe school community. The goal is to enable optimal student learning. Created by classroom teachers and backed by evidence from independent research, the Responsive Classroom approach is based on the premise that children learn best when they have both academic and social-emotional skills. The approach therefore consists of classroom and school wide practices for deliberately helping children build academic and social-emotional competencies.

There are seven principles associated to Responsive Classroom. The guiding principles associated with Responsive Classroom include:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn: Process and content go hand in hand.
- The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need a set of social skills: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach-individually, culturally, and developmentally-is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach and working with them as partners is essential to children's education.
- How the adults at school work together is as important as their individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

Embedded within the guided principles, you will find ten core classroom practices:

Morning Meeting - gathering as a whole class each morning to greet one another, share news, and warm up for the day ahead

Rule Creation - helping students create classroom rules to ensure an environment that allows all class members to meet their learning goals

Interactive Modeling - teaching children to notice and internalize expected behaviors through a unique modeling technique

Positive Teacher Language - using words and tone as a tool to promote children's active learning, sense of community, and self-discipline

Logical Consequences - responding to misbehavior in a way that allows children to fix and learn from their mistakes while preserving their dignity

Guided Discovery - introducing classroom materials using a format that encourages independence, creativity, and responsibility

Academic Choice - increasing student learning by allowing students teacher-structured choices in their work

Classroom Organization - setting up the physical room in ways that encourage students' independence, cooperation, and productivity

Working with Families - creating avenues for hearing parents' insights and helping them understand the school's teaching approaches

Collaborative Problem Solving - using conferencing, role playing, and other strategies to resolve problems with students

We are confident that Responsive Classroom will bring about positive change into all classrooms. The full implementation of Responsive Classroom will take a few years in order for all of the elementary schools to become "schoolwide." In the interim, we are hoping that we will see continuous improvements with test scores, delivering a high quality instruction, social skills amongst students, time allocated for teacher collaboration, and overall student feelings about school.

We are excited to get aboard the Responsive Classroom train. We hope that you are willing to come along during this exciting journey. Should you have any questions about this approach, please feel free to contact me at school or you may contact your child's classroom teacher.

Sincerely,

Tonya Breland