



THE  
*Responsive Classroom*<sup>®</sup>  
APPROACH

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

***What is the Responsive Classroom approach?***

It is a way of teaching that creates a safe, challenging, and joyful classroom and schoolwide climate for all students. Teachers who use the *Responsive Classroom* approach understand that all of students' needs—academic, social, emotional, and physical—are important. Elementary and middle school teachers create an environment that responds to all of those needs so that your child can do his or her best learning.

The *Responsive Classroom* approach develops teachers' competencies in four key areas:

- **Engaging Academics**—Teachers create learning tasks that are active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, and connected to students' interests.
- **Positive Community**—Teachers nurture a sense of belonging, significance, and emotional safety so that students feel comfortable taking risks and working with a variety of peers.
- **Effective Management**—Teachers create a calm, orderly environment that promotes autonomy and allows students to focus on learning.
- **Developmentally Responsive Teaching**—Teachers use knowledge of child development, along with observations of students, to create a developmentally appropriate learning environment.

***How might the Responsive Classroom approach look and sound in my child's classroom?***

The *Responsive Classroom* approach offers practical strategies for teaching, rather than formulas telling teachers what they must do in the classroom. Teachers adapt the strategies as needed to address their students' needs, so things may look a bit different in each classroom. But you'll usually see and hear teachers:

- **Leading a daily Morning Meeting in the elementary setting and a Responsive Advisory Meeting in the middle school setting.** These routines set a positive tone and build a sense of community and belonging while giving students practice in key academic and social skills.
- **Teaching students the specific skills they need to participate successfully,** from how to respond to a signal for quiet to how to respectfully disagree with a classmate.
- **Treating mistakes in a positive way.** Teachers see mistakes (in academics and in behavior) as important steps in learning. They encourage students to learn from their mistakes and "try again." They offer support and reteach as needed. At the same time, teachers provide clear expectations for behavior and stop misbehavior quickly so that students can focus on learning.

- **Using positive language.** Teachers choose words and tone that encourage students to work hard, enjoy learning, and persist through difficulties.
- **Teaching in ways that build excitement about learning.** Teachers give students some choices in their learning. They also plan active lessons (ones that get students up and moving) and interactive lessons (ones that encourage students to share their information, ideas, and questions).
- **Giving students opportunities to reflect on their learning.** Teachers ask students to think about what they've learned, both individually and as a group, because doing so helps students learn more and builds community.
- **Reaching out to parents.** Teachers communicate often with parents and welcome them as partners in their child's education.

### ***How do you know it works?***

Over the past thirty years, teachers who use *Responsive Classroom* strategies have reported significant improvements in their students' learning and behavior. And researchers, as well as teachers, have found that students:

- Achieve higher scores on math and reading tests
- Have better social skills (listening, disagreeing respectfully, waiting for a turn, etc.)
- Feel more positive about school, teachers, and peers

### ***Where did the Responsive Classroom approach come from?***

A group of public school educators began developing it in 1981, building on the best research about how children learn. Over the years, the approach has been refined to reflect the most current and useful knowledge about children.

### ***What social skills do teachers focus on?***

Students learn academics most easily when they have strong social skills that let them take a positive role in classroom life. For example, the social skill of listening respectfully helps students learn from classmates' oral reports, get information from their teacher about how to solve a math problem, and enjoy a book the teacher reads aloud to the class.

Here are some of the specific social skills that teachers focus on throughout the year, with special emphasis during the early weeks of school:

- Cooperation (working smoothly with others)
- Assertiveness (confidently putting forth your ideas and opinions)
- Responsibility (taking charge of yourself and working hard at your learning)
- Self-control (thinking before acting)
- Empathy (listening to others and understanding how they might respond to your words or actions)

### ***How do teachers teach these skills?***

Teachers understand that students may not come to their classrooms knowing how to take turns, listen, disagree respectfully, walk quietly in a hallway, or do many other things that reflect positive school behavior. To help the students learn, teachers will carefully:

- Break skills and tasks into small parts
- Briefly describe the behavior they're looking for
- Model the behavior
- Give students plenty of practice and feedback
- Reteach as necessary throughout the year

### ***When do teachers teach these skills?***

Teachers weave social skills teaching into everything the students do—academics, recess, lunch, and even entering and leaving the school building and classroom. During a math lesson, for example, third graders learn how to count money while also learning how to listen respectfully to a classmate's idea for how to solve a problem. During recess, students of all ages learn how to include everyone in their games.

Although teachers help students learn social skills throughout the school year, they focus most strongly on teaching these skills during the early weeks of school. It's during this time that expectations for behavior are clearly laid out and students are taught how to meet these expectations. When teachers take the time to teach and model these skills well in the beginning of the year, they spend less time on behavior problems and more time on learning all year long.

### ***What about classroom rules?***

During the early weeks of school, teacher and students create rules based on the students' goals for learning.

Students follow the rules more willingly because they helped to make them. Teachers refer to the rules many times throughout the day and year, helping students understand how following the rules helps everyone to learn. Some schools also have a few basic schoolwide rules that everyone follows in the hallways, lunchroom, and other common spaces.

### ***What do teachers do when children break the rules?***

Teachers understand that all students will, at one time or another, test or break the rules. When that happens, teachers discipline firmly but kindly and positively. The goals are (1) to stop the misbehavior as quickly as possible so that the child (and classmates) can get back to learning and (2) to teach the child to reflect on and control his or her own behavior.

The *Responsive Classroom* approach offers teachers many tools to help students control their own behavior and contribute to the classroom community. One very important tool is clear, positive language. When students are just beginning to go off course, teachers use reminding

language (Karen, what should you be doing right now?). When students are clearly misbehaving, teachers use redirecting language (Mike, hands in your lap). And when students are doing well, teachers use reinforcing language (I noticed that you cleaned up very quickly today). Teachers also make sure that the consequences for misbehavior are related to the misbehavior and respectful of the child.

Many teachers also use positive time-out (although the class may decide on a different name, such as take-a-break) to help students regain control when they're just beginning to lose it. Time-out offers students a quick way to calm down, reset, and rejoin the class with dignity—it's not a punishment.

### ***How can I learn more about the Responsive Classroom approach?***

- Visit the *Responsive Classroom* website: [www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)
- Sign up on the website for the free monthly email newsletter that features articles from the Information Library
- Follow *Responsive Classroom* on Facebook or Twitter