

August 24, 2009

Dear Families,

I want to let you know of an approach to teaching that I use. It's called the *Responsive Classroom* approach. It's been used successfully by elementary teachers in school around the country for over twenty years to create learning environments where children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

The *Responsive Classroom* approach was developed by classroom teachers. It emphasizes teaching children to take care of their needs as well as help care for each other and the school environment so that everyone can learn at his/her best. You'll notice our class paying attention to how students treat one another throughout the day. You'll also see a strong emphasis on students setting goals for their own learning and taking responsibility for reaching those goals.

Guiding Principles:

The responsive classroom approach is based on theories of how children learn and on the experiences of classroom teachers. There are seven basic principles behind this approach:

- ❖ Learning social skills is as important as learning academic skills.
- ❖ How children learn is as important as what they learn; process and content go hand in hand.
- ❖ Children gain knowledge most effectively through social interaction.
- ❖ To be successful academically and socially, children need to learn 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 inviting their participation is essential to children's education.
- ❖ How the adults at school work together is as important as how skillful each individual teacher is; lasting change begins with the adult community.

Teaching Practices:

The *Responsive Classroom* approach includes the following main parts. I will begin using each of these parts in my classroom this year.

Morning Meeting:

Children gather for fifteen to twenty minutes each day to greet each other, share news, do a group activity, and look forward to the day ahead. This daily routine builds community creates a positive climate for learning, and gives children practice in a wide range of academic and social skills.

Rules and Logical Consequences:

The teachers and children together create rules for the classroom that will allow everyone to do his/her best learning. When children break the rules, there are clear and non-punitive consequences that help them learn from their mistakes. This approach teaches responsibility and self-control.

Guided discovery:

Teachers use a structured way of introducing materials so that children become interested and motivated to explore different ways to use materials.

Academic Choice:

Children are given choices in their learning within clear boundaries to help them become invested, self-motivated learners. Academic choice is also used to help students establish connections between different subject areas. I will give students a basic task demonstrating beginning proficiency and then allow them 2 or 3 choices about how they extend their understanding.

In connection with the *Responsive Classroom Approach*, I have the following expectations:

- ❖ Students arrive no later than 9:00 each morning whenever possible to receive the full benefit of our planning time and academic exploration at the beginning of the day.
- ❖ Students will learn to assertively take care of their needs. This means that if their behavior is causing a problem, they will need to take time to think about what they can do to change the situation.
- ❖ If behavior becomes a chronic problem, then I will notify you and we can help the student to change the situation.
- ❖ The adults at Wichita Friends School model respectful behavior consistently that includes talking directly and honestly to one another and the students when faced with a problem.
- ❖ Listening to each other and valuing each person's opinion as well nurturing their positive contribution to our community is an essential part of each school day.

Please let me know if you have any question. You can also learn more about the *Responsive Classroom Approach* by checking out the website at: www.responsiveclassroom.org.

I look forward to a productive and joyful year with your child!

Sincerely,

Diana J. Rankin