

September 30, 2007

Good morning Lower School families!

This summer twenty-one of our Lower School faculty participated in a Responsive Classroom training. Responsive Classroom is an approach to teaching and learning that “fosters safe, challenging, and joyful elementary classrooms and schools. Developed by classroom teachers, this approach consists of teaching practices for bringing together social and academic learning throughout the school day.”¹ There are many components to this approach, and our teachers learned about some of them during our week of work together. Over the coming weeks, the focus of my letters will be on the components now being used in our classrooms and the impact they have on our students.

Each day, the students of our Lower School gather to worship and sing together in our whole school Morning Meeting. We meet our buddies, share events happening in our classrooms, and discuss how we can make our school a wonderful place to learn. This year, we have added a classroom Morning Meeting. Here, the meeting has different but important goals that can be seen throughout the day and throughout the school. The classroom Morning Meeting is a time where the sense of belonging and the skills of attention, listening, expression and cooperation are developed. The intentional teaching of these skills becomes the foundation for everything in our classrooms from lessons, to lining up, to lunch to solving a problem with a friend. It is a time to explore and practice social skills in a predictable and safe environment.

Classroom Morning Meeting has four goals. The first goal is to help create the positive power of community by fulfilling a child’s need to feel belonging, to feel significance and to have fun. Secondly, Morning Meeting helps to teach the skills of friendliness and interest in others through sharing, listening, participation and conversation. Third, Morning Meeting is a time to model and practice the social skills children need to use all day – cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy and self-control. Finally, Morning Meeting allows us to merge social, emotional and academic learning in a structured, daily routine.

If you were to visit a classroom Morning Meeting, you would be able to identify four distinct, but vital components. Each component plays an important role in setting the foundation for what happens each day and throughout the year. The first component is a greeting. Here children greet each other by name. In greeting each other, children set a positive tone for the day, provide each other with a sense of belonging and significance, learn and use everyone’s name and to practice hospitality.

The next component of classroom Morning Meeting is sharing. During sharing, students present news they wish to share or respond to a topic developed by the teacher. Students learn the skills required to be an effective sharer as well as the skills demanded of the audience. Sharers must determine an appropriate topic, organize their information, and speak in a voice that can be heard by all. Members of the audience must practice careful listening skills in order to formulate and ask open-ended questions, communicate comments to the sharer, and to feel and show empathy. As you can see, this is a very

¹¹ Responsive Classroom Level I Resource Book. Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc. 2007

complex and important set of skills all children need. Sharing is a time to practice these skills so they can be called upon and used daily.

The third component of classroom Morning Meeting is the group activity. These activities vary but enhance social and academic learning. Through the activities, classes begin to create their own culture and community of learners. Students are actively engaged participants practicing the social skills of cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy and self-control through fun group experiences.

The final component of classroom Morning Meeting is the reading of the morning message. Written in the form of a letter to the students, teachers stimulate reflective thinking and generate opportunities to practice important language, math, and other academic skills alongside social skills. It serves as a bridge between the structure of classroom Morning Meeting to the events waiting for them throughout the day.

Much happens in the twenty or so minutes of a classroom Morning Meeting. As a teacher, I loved my Morning Meetings because it was time when I could connect and really see each of my students. I have heard the same from our teachers, and having joined many classroom meetings this year, I see that the students love them as well. I would encourage you to join your child's classroom for one of their morning meetings. I know you will see just how important a time it is in the day of each of our children.

Until next time.....