

September, 2012

Dear Parents,

I want to let you know about an approach to teaching that we use in our classroom and throughout the Edgartown School. The **Responsive Classroom** has been successfully used by K-8 teachers in schools around the country for over 20 years to create learning environments where children thrive academically, socially and emotionally. It emphasizes teaching children to take care of themselves, each other and the school environment so that everyone can learn at his/her best.

The Guiding Principles of Responsive Classroom

The Responsive Classroom approach is based on many of the great theories of how children learn and on the experiences of classroom teachers. There are seven basic principles behind the 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. We will be using some or all of these in our classroom this year.

***Morning Meeting:** Children gather for twenty minutes or so every day to greet each other, read the morning letter, 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 teacher and children 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 the mistake. This approach teaches responsibility and self-control.

***Guided Discovery:** A structured way of introducing materials so that children become interested and motivated to explore different ways to use materials. This also helps us teach the children where materials go in the classroom, and how to take care of the materials.

***Academic Choice:** An approach to giving children choices in their learning to help them become invested, self-motivated learners. Academic choice can be used to teach any subject.

***Classroom Organization:** Arranging materials, furniture, and displays in ways that encourage learning, care, positive social interaction, and independence in children. For example, in the next 6-8 weeks of school, children will know exactly where to find each and every material they will need in the classroom in order to be an independent learner.

***Working Together With Parents:** Ideas for involving parents as true partners in their children's education.

Please let me know if you have any questions. You can learn more about the Responsive Classroom approach by going to www.responsiveclassroom.org. I look forward to a productive and joyful year with your child!

Sincerely,

Denise Searle