

Creating Equity Using the *Responsive Classroom*[®] Approach

What Is Equity?

Center for Responsive Schools (CRS) defines equity as the reduction and elimination of the disparities and effects of inequalities that are perpetuated in educational beliefs, biases, practices, systems, and policies that maintain the status quo and result in unfair education, treatment, and opportunities for minority and disadvantaged students.

CRS was founded almost forty years ago on the ideals of community, equity, and social-emotional learning. Originally established as a school where all students and adults could be known and valued in their community, CRS focuses on theories of human development and reflects an understanding of the social and emotional growth of students.

How Does the *Responsive Classroom* Approach Address Equity?

Responsive Classroom is a student-centered, social and emotional learning approach to teaching and discipline. A teacher's approach to teaching and discipline are two major contributing factors of equity. Educators who can define and articulate the goals and intended outcomes of their approach to teaching and discipline are better empowered and more likely to identify and use practices that both align with their philosophical beliefs and support their goals for students' behavior as well as their academic, social, and emotional learning outcomes.



The Approach to Teaching

There can be no doubt that what teachers believe, know, and can do powerfully influences student learning. *Responsive Classroom* works because it addresses this belief-knowledge-action triad. It shifts teachers' beliefs about children and learning, equips them with new knowledge and skills, and encourages them to transform their teaching by putting their new beliefs and knowledge into action. *Responsive Classroom* creates the conditions for equity by creating a place where all students belong, all are significant, and all can find joy—a place that recognizes everyone who walks through the doors brings unique gifts and desires to learn. We create these conditions because we know “access to high-quality, equitable learning environments that respond to each child's needs, assets, culture, and stage development can help mitigate stresses and provide a pathway to a more equitable future” (The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).



The Approach to Discipline

Discipline is one of the greatest promoters of inequity. We know from research that “students of color and low-income students, who are more likely to experience external stressors outside of school, are less likely than their peers to report high levels of support, safety, and trust in school, and they are more likely to experience punitive disciplinary practices” (The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). *Responsive Classroom* addresses this through its approach to teaching discipline. Educators using the *Responsive Classroom* approach take a nonpunitive approach to discipline with particular focus on 1) creating safe and predictable learning environments to lay the foundation; 2) preventing off-task behavior and misbehavior by establishing rules and holding students to those rules in a proactive, firm, and consistent manner; 3) responding to off-task and misbehavior respectfully—preserving the dignity of the student—to help students get back on track and repair any damage; 4) solving chronic behavior problems by understanding the particular problem and utilizing individualized discipline practices to help the student develop self-regulation and return to positive behavior; and 5) managing outbursts to deescalate or interrupt behavior or emotional outbursts and help the student regain control.

Systemic Change

Responsive Classroom recognizes that established systems may work for some. Still, we always need to be challenging the status quo rather than maintaining stagnant systems where we always expect students to adjust. We must focus on ready schools rather than ready students.

Responsive Classroom creates the conditions for change that address academic and discipline disparity through practical strategies in the following four domains.



Positive community:

A safe, predictable, joyful, and inclusive environment where all students have a sense of belonging and significance. Discipline is taught through a set of strategies aimed at proactively setting students up for success, preserving the dignity of the student and group, and helping students to develop self-discipline.

Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory

Meeting: Daily meetings that build community, honor identity, and promote belonging, significance, and fun.

Teacher language: Speaking in ways that lead each student to envision success, think deeply, set goals, and work hard to achieve them.

Positive discipline: Involving students in creating rules, proactively teaching these rules, and responding nonpunitively to restore positive behavior, preserve student dignity, and continue learning.



Effective management:

A calm and orderly learning environment that promotes autonomy, responsibility, and high engagement in learning.

Routines and expectations: Managing classroom time and space in ways that allow students to focus on learning and building autonomy.

Classroom organization: Organizing the classroom space to represent and support the learners it serves.



Engaging academics:

Learner-centered lessons that are participatory, appropriately challenging, fun, and relevant, and that promote curiosity, wonder, and interest.

Academic Choice: Giving students meaningful choices in their learning.

Teaching the language of learning: Intentionally teaching speaking and listening competencies necessary for college and career readiness.

Active teaching and student practice: Teaching new skills in a way that includes demonstration and guided practice.



Developmentally responsive teaching:

Basing all decisions for teaching and discipline upon research and knowledge of students' social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Knowing all students: A collection of practices for learning about each student individually, culturally, and developmentally.

Building upon strengths: Structuring appropriately challenging lessons to connect learning to and build upon students' strengths.

Parents as partners: Strategies for involving families of diverse cultures and backgrounds.

Reference

Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development. (2019). *From a nation at risk to a nation at hope*. https://nationathope.org/wp-content/uploads/2018_aspen_final-report_full_webversion.pdf