

Parent Version: Our Beliefs
Minnewashta Elementary 2021

At Minnewashta, we have been using Responsive Classroom practices for 18 years. We started Our Beliefs over 15 years ago to help us know and articulate who we are and what we believe as a staff.

We update it every few years to keep it relevant. We will make this available to you over the next several weeks in smaller increments. The document contains "educational jargon," and I have left many of the links intact. We hope sharing Our Beliefs helps our community know our intentions and build a community to sustain our important work.

Let me know if you have questions or hope to learn more about our practices related to Responsive Classroom. Cindy

Introduction

At Minnewashta Elementary School, we are committed to providing a welcoming, safe environment that is supportive, caring, diverse, responsive, respectful, and a fun learning community for all of our students and staff. We are a community where all adults and children care for themselves and each other.

We

- believe that each of us has something unique to contribute
- collaborate to bring out the best in everyone
- cultivate a positive environment where children may become socially, emotionally, academically, and behaviorally confident
- look inward to see how we can help fix a wrong to make it better
- promote the greater good
- use proactive and responsive strategies to keep our learning community healthy and thriving
- strive to help everyone feel a sense of belonging

We believe learning is a life-long journey and commit to learning each day.

Minnewashta Belief Statement

Respect yourself and others. Be safe and have fun. Do your best.

Principles of Discipline

Our children

- desire to be positive
- are capable of learning
- have diverse academic, social, and emotional needs
- need social skills to achieve academic and social success

Some of the skills include CARES.

- Cooperation
- Assertion
- Responsibility
- Empathy
- Self Control

Ruth Charney (2002) emphasizes children benefit from the collaboration of all adults in the school and family community.

Social Thinking

- As a staff:
 - We believe in using the Social Thinking language and concepts to support our students.
 - We agree to use Social Thinking language and concepts across all school settings at Minnewashta (i.e., calling the schedule for the day or a class the “group plan”).
 - We agree to attend ongoing Social Thinking training to maintain fidelity with our implementation.
 - We agree NOT to use Social Thinking language in a punitive way, as this is counter to the intent of this work.
- If interested in knowing more, please [read this document](#). It is a short snapshot response to the question “Why Social Thinking?” and was shared by trainer Kari Palmer with permission.
- If interested in knowing more, please [read these definitions about the different Social Thinking concepts](#) shared, with permission, from Kari Palmer.

Responsive Classroom Beliefs*

We believe that the RC Beliefs best reflect our beliefs for our school and our students. We developed this document in 2005 and continue to update it every few years to help us collectively.

RC beliefs are based on developmental, cognitive, and social learning theory and can be summarized as follows:

- The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what children learn.
- The most significant cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- Children need a set of social skills to succeed academically and socially (see *CARES*, p6).
- Knowing the children we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children.
- Adults must model the social and academic skills they wish to teach their children through a shared mission.

The six *essential* guiding principles, in a slightly different way.

1. Teaching social and emotional skills is as important as teaching academic content.
2. How we teach is as important as what we teach.
3. Significant cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. As adults, working together to create a safe, joyful, and inclusive school environment is as

crucial as our contribution or competence. To be successful in and out of school, students need to learn a set of social and emotional competencies—cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control—and a set of academic competencies—academic mindset, perseverance, learning strategies, and academic behaviors.

5. What we know and believe about our students—individually, culturally, developmentally—informs our expectations, reactions, and attitudes about those students.
6. Partnering with families—knowing them and valuing their contributions—is as important as knowing the children we teach.

[Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based practice as defined in ESSA](#)
[Is RC associated with increased academic achievement?](#)
[Build Connections](#)

Classroom Agreements

Through dialogue with the children about their values and beliefs, students will build a typical picture of how the Minnewashta belief statement looks, sounds, and feels in the classroom within our school community. Students will establish a favorable behavior agreement through guided discussion in all community areas (e.g., the classroom, the music room, the cafeteria, the hallway, and the playground).

This process will take time and several sessions to accomplish. Forming classroom agreements is a critical step for our community to be healthy and thrive. Please have the students plan to share classroom agreements the week of October 11. We will host grade-level meetings where each class will share classroom agreements. The themes of the “group plan, thinking with your eyes, body in the group, and whole-body listening” will be a common focus. We embed specific language from our Social Thinking work throughout all aspects of the school day.

Six Week Timeline**

Intentions

An *intentional* start to the academic and social curriculum will:

- Build a foundation of respect, trust, safety, and kindness.
- Provide opportunities for the children to model and practice routines and procedures.
- Establish a climate where children feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and learning from them.
- Encourage a sense of belonging and responsibility as an essential member of the classroom and school community.
- Create an environment where children are engaged and excited to explore their unique learning potential.

**Our Six Week Timeline is a foundation for all grade levels, [specialist spaces](#), and intervention locations. Educators may need to modify certain expectations due to time with students and the physical environment. All adults within the school community *will* follow the outlined First Six Weeks of School. The resources are available in our professional collection located below the East Gym.

[The First Six Weeks of School](#) by Paula Denton & Roxann Kriete

[Classroom Spaces That Work](#) by Marlynn K. Clayton with Mary Beth Forton

[Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14](#) by Chip Wood

[Rules in School](#) by Kathryn Brady, Mary Beth Forton, Deborah Porter & Chip Wood

[The First 12-weeks of Physical Education](#)

Week Before Students Start School

- Review Our Beliefs (all staff) available in the MWA Staff Team Drive (copy available for reserve teachers (in Reserve Folders) at S: drive-->Reserve Teachers-->MWA.
- Complete [Hopes and Dreams](#) for the year (all staff)
- Make Minnewashta Belief Statement posters, 'thumbs up/thumbs down/stop sign' posters, and Lunchroom Oath posters available to all staff in Spanish and English
- Consider the developmental needs of your students, utilizing the [Yardsticks](#) book above (birthday cluster exercise p. 195)
- Consider how to best create a classroom space that will work for your students, using the resources above and the following guidelines from [Creating a Place for Learning September 17, 2019](#):
 - Set up your classroom in an arrangement that accommodates the physical sizes of your students and any special needs they may have
 - Make sure you have a comfortable, clear whole-group meeting area (3' between students where possible)
 - Consider where students will line up at the door and pass each other within the room to ensure a safe and smooth traffic flow (visuals on the floor can be helpful)
 - Leave blank space on walls and bulletin boards for students to display quality work and to take ownership in their classroom environment (please, let your students help you create your environment)
 - Create two places to think with comfortable seating, calming visuals, manipulatives, and thinking prompts for students to use as needed (a Pinterest consult is not required!)

Two Simple Rules for Reducing Clutter

Two-Year Rule:

- Suppose you haven't used a teaching material, looked at the periodical sitting in the corner, or referenced that article pinned to your bulletin board for two years. In that case, chances are you never will. It's probably safe to get rid of them.
- Two-Inch Rule:
- No pile of papers should get higher than two inches. If that pile on your desk grows two inches tall, it's time for you to sort, file, and throw away.

Source: [Classroom Spaces that Work](#), April 1, 2001

First Week September 8-10, 2021

- Teach the signals for silence (first day)
- Learn each others' names and begin to learn about each others' interests and experiences
- Build a foundation for classroom agreement and classroom rules
 - Establish expectations about learning and playing together within the school

community (recess, hallways, lunchrooms, bathrooms, etc.)

- Share and practice these community expectations at a group assembly as appropriate.
- Create and display Hopes and Dreams in classroom communities
- Present and display art, writing, and other quality work in classrooms and throughout the school community
- Introduce and practice common language: Y chart (looks like, sounds like, feels like), thumbs up/thumbs down/stop sign behaviors
- Model and practice community routines: hand washing, bathroom, drinks, hallway, buses, playground/recess, cafeteria, and other common areas
- Model and practice classroom routines: beginning and end of day activities, transitions, Morning Meeting procedures, and other classroom routines
- Model and practice the use of classroom materials through Guided Discoveries*** and interactive modeling

***[Guided Discoveries](#): focused, purposeful, yet playful techniques teachers use to [introduce materials](#), areas, or activities to students. A teacher might use guided discovery to introduce a learning center, within the classroom or in other common areas in the school community; a specific material, such as a box of crayons or compass; or a process, such as a journal writing or quiet time. An idea to explore is [interactive modeling](#).

Second Week September 13-17, 2021

- Create, model, and practice community and classroom rules
 - Make rules with the students: brainstorm initial ideas, organize ideas into categories, then name the final rules
 - Take the rules outside the classroom: lunchroom, bus, recess, wherever we go!
- Continue to model and practice community and classroom routines
- Explore and create logical consequences
- Utilize Morning Meetings, games, and group initiatives, including time for debriefing and reflection, to build positive group identity
- Establish daily academic choice or activity time
- Continue use of common language and add 3 R's: Reinforce, Remind, and Refocus
- Continue Guided Discoveries/interactive modeling
- Begin a few curriculum sequences

Third Week September 20-24, 2021

- Continue creating, modeling, and practicing rules, routines, and logical consequences.
- Continue use of common language
- Continue Guided Discoveries
- Post rules and logical consequences on Schoology (4-5) and SeeSaw (K-2)
- Participate in the curriculum in all major subject areas, stopping for reflection and redirection as often as is needed for students to be equally successful at both academic and social expectations ([the idea is building stamina without physical rewards](#))