

# Highlighting Academics with Belonging, Significance and Fun

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January 02, 2019 Categories: [Elementary School](#) / [Middle School](#) / [Morning Meeting](#) / [Responsive Advisory Meeting](#)



*“When we start the day with everyone together, face to face, welcoming each person, sharing news, listening to individual voices, and communicating as a caring group, we make several powerful statements. We say that every person counts. We say that the way we interact individually and as a group is significant. We say that our classroom culture is one of friendliness and thoughtfulness. We say that we can accomplish hard work and make important discoveries together. We say that teachers hold authority, even though they are a part of a the circle. We say that this is a place where courtesy and warmth and safety reign—a place of respect for all.”* —Roxann Kriete and Carol Davis, [The Morning Meeting Book](#)

**Morning Meeting** is a Responsive Classroom teaching tool that gives **Elementary** educators an engaging way to start each day, build a strong sense of community, and set children up for success, both socially and academically. Each morning, students and teachers gather together in a circle for twenty to thirty minutes and interact with one another during four purposeful components: Greeting, Sharing, Group Activity, and Morning Message.

**Responsive Advisory Meeting** serves as an anchor for **Middle School** educators and students, providing a predictable routine for students undergoing rapid physical, emotional, and intellectual changes. It offers a space and structure for teachers to support students, both individually and as a group, as they develop their sense of self and identity in connection to their relationships with peers.

These meetings serve multiple purposes, including setting a tone for respectful and engaged learning in a climate of trust, merging academic, social and emotional learning, and meeting students' needs for belonging, significance and fun.

We talked with *Responsive Classroom* Consulting Teachers and Curriculum & Instruction Designers Jane Cofie (Elementary) and Amber Searles (Middle School) about using Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting to make belonging, significance and fun priorities in the classroom.

### **Why should teachers make belonging, significance, and fun priorities?**

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**Jane Cofie:** Every child wants to feel like they are an important part of their classroom community, and that they are uniquely known. When students walk into the classroom on the first day of school, some are nervous or anxious. Some are excited. But all students want to know that they are entering a classroom community in which they will fit in, be cared for, feel safe to make mistakes and take risks, and have fun throughout the school year. Cultivating that sense of belonging for all your students should be a priority for all those reasons. In addition, when you truly know your students, you can foster a community of learners that feel significant, and are engaged throughout the day. And it's such a powerful feeling to laugh with your students, and to feel that strong sense of community.

**Amber Searles:** When teachers make belonging, significance and fun priorities for their students, they are promoting a sense of community in the classroom. Just like adults, children long for these things. Students are more motivated academically, socially and emotionally when these needs are met. Just think about how much more comfortable students will be in a classroom environment in which these priorities are encouraged.

### **What would you say to teachers who don't think there's time for Morning Meeting or Responsive Advisory Meetings?**

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**JC:** There's always time to build a positive classroom community, and Morning Meeting is time well spent. You may have to combine Morning Meeting components like the greeting and the sharing, or space components out throughout the day, but the goal is to create a positive community and set the tone for the day of learning ahead. That's important. There were years in which my students had to go to specials right away, so we met for the greeting and sharing components because we only had 10 minutes. Then, when my students came back, we did the activity and the message. I was always very strategic with the message, because it was the link to the learning in which we were about to engage. It didn't feel like I was losing time; I was setting my students up to be successful.

**AS:** Responsive Advisory Meeting doesn't necessarily have to happen daily – it could happen weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, or at times when you notice a need to strengthen your class community. They don't need to take more than 20 minutes to facilitate. Just as we make the time to teach our respective academic content, we should make the time to teach students how to develop and build positive relationships with their peers. The Responsive

Advisory Meeting may be the only opportunity some students have to talk with peers that they would not normally connect with. Teachers are often amazed at how these meetings change the dynamics of a classroom structure when planned purposefully.

“It didn’t feel like I was losing time; I was setting my students up to be successful”-Jane Cofie, *Responsive Classroom* Consulting Teacher

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**Can you highlight academics in Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting, while still meeting students’ needs for belonging, significance, and fun?**

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**JC:** Yes! Depending on which grade level I was teaching, at certain times during the school year I devoted months of Morning Meetings to address specific content—all while still meeting those needs for belonging, significance, and fun. I embedded more challenging academic content into a familiar structure or activity we all loved, so each of my students could engage and feel successful while still having fun.

**AS:** Absolutely! Responsive Advisory Meetings are designed to meet seven purposes, one of which is Academic Readiness. In each class, I ensure that students have academic goals that they would like to meet. Meetings focused on Academic Readiness help students exercise the skills needed for them to engage in rigorous content, and guide them to meet their academic goals.

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**What are some specific strategies teachers can use to highlight academics in Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting?**

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**JC:** I recommend strategically planning Morning Meeting, as you would any other content area, and identify specific goals to meet during the meeting or within a specific meeting component. Creating a separate lesson plan for Morning Meeting to address academic and social skills can be very helpful. Looking through all the *Doing Morning Meeting* books for ideas, while keeping in mind the specific group of students in your classroom community, will help you determine which activities will best support the goals you establish.

When I was teaching, the social studies curriculum for 4th grade was entirely about Virginia history, from the 1600s to the present. I would structure different components of Morning Meeting to highlight the content vocabulary, famous people, and events we were studying. This was very helpful, because I would discover some of the strengths of my class, as well as areas I needed to revisit during social studies. We also did activities over several days to reinforce skills, and allow for student success during Morning Meeting. In addition, I planned out when to introduce a specific new component, so I would not be modeling every component during one day of Morning Meeting. For instance, I would do a new literacy-focused greeting on Tuesday and keep it the same all week, and then introduce a new activity on Friday and keep the activity the same until the following week.

**AS:** Specific strategies teachers can use to highlight academics during Responsive Advisory Meeting include teaching students how to set SMART Goals, how to strengthen their study skills and test taking skills, and how to be organized and prepared for class.

### **How do you use the learning you scaffold in Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting throughout the day?**

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**JC:** I used the Morning Message the most. I would use the interactive piece or the question I posted in the lesson as the lead, link, or warm up for the learning for a specific content area later. Sometimes I would specifically embed an activity or interactive learning structure into Morning Meeting so I could use the same structure or activity during social studies. For instance, I might use Taking Sides for the activity during Morning Meeting, on low-risk topics like foods, places, or hobbies. Then during social studies, I would use the same structure for students to identify whether an event or person was more associated with the loyalists or the patriots during the Revolutionary War. Since students were already familiar with the structure from Morning Meeting, I could refer to it to gently remind students, and then move into embedding academic content.

**AS:** Throughout the day, I make connections by mentioning the discussions, and skills students displayed, during the Responsive Advisory Meeting. When students begin to see and make that connection they will understand the meaning behind the Responsive Advisory Meeting, and how it benefits them throughout the day socially and academically.

### **Learn more about supporting academics with Morning Meeting and Responsive Advisory Meeting:**

| [Morning Meeting Book](#)

| [The Responsive Advisory Meeting Book](#)

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