

## Dynamic Classes: How to progress through classes

If students believe they are ready to move to a more challenging class, they are encouraged to discuss this possibility with their classroom teacher. Teachers never take this personally; rather, if data show that a student is indeed ready to move on, it is a cause for celebration for a job well done. Classroom rosters change frequently and careful observations and timely assessments of high and low outliers in a class prompt an efficient move to a different class if possible. These moves and changes are often initiated by the teacher as well. Another option is a teacher may challenge an advanced student with enrichment activities within the current class. The school psychologist is included in the decision making process, providing entry skill tests for the next level up. Information about their current place in the curriculum ladder will help to determine the best fit for any given student. That being said, requests based on friendships, social groups, or conversely, conflicts within a classroom are generally not acted upon. Rather, a conflict is addressed and resolved in the classroom. Academic progress and effective instruction at a student's present level are a prime strength of Morningside's proven success. Moving a student to "where their friends are" is the opposite of this core belief.

## Mixed Age Environment

In keeping with our mixed age environment, both in the classrooms and during unstructured time at breaks and recess, students are expected to be aware of the wide variety of students around them, and refrain from cursing or discussing subjects with overt sexual undertones. Indeed, any negative behaviors are addressed in terms of how they affect the persons around you rather than simply the breaking of rules. Ideally, students should be able to determine appropriate language and topics for conversation. If they need reminders from faculty or staff, the expectation is that language is altered quickly and without argument. These adjustments in behaviors are meant to be quick, friendly, in the moment transactions, and not the start of extended attention to an undesired behavior.

## Teachers Asking for Change

At times, positive strokes and reward systems fail to be meaningful to a student. In this case a family meeting may be called. These meetings are by no means meant to be punitive, or a reason to shame a student for undesired behaviors. Rather, they serve as a way to reset the teacher/student partnership with much appreciated insight and support from parents or guardians. Teachers are expected to lead with the positive and point out first what is going well at school. Students are often unaware of how much they are actually doing right, and these positive instances are the best predictors of easier changes to put in place. Teachers will suggest some tactics and routines to try out, and will seek input from the student and family as well. Students are expected to meet teachers halfway and try out a new routine, and not fall back on negative learning histories or defeatist beliefs such as I'm just bad at... or I can't. Students are expected and encouraged to share their own ideas of what might work as well. Parents and guardians are expected to continue the support practiced using the Daily Support Card, emphasizing the positive skills in place and addressing the undesired behavior with a problem-solving team oriented approach.

## Students Asking for Change

At times, students want to ask for a change as well. Students at Morningside are expected and encouraged to approach an adult and bring up areas of dissatisfaction. We are willing to listen and ready to help and invoke change. Timely discussion is expected. The first adult should always be the classroom teacher or an adult overseeing that part of the school day. Other helpful adults are the student's Advocate, our School Psychologist, Assistant Director, Principal, or Founder who will always kindly ask if the student has first spoken to the adult at hand. The expectation is that the same approach is taken here that is taken in all aspects at Morningside; a negative aspect is stated but the focus is always problem solving - how to arrive at the desired positive outcome. Students have a right to a positive school environment and they are listened to with respect. The expectation is that students show the same respect when they want to produce a positive change, and that they refrain from speaking in a negative manner or insulting tones about another student, teacher, or a specific aspect of the school they dislike. As stated before, students are expected to be aware of how their transactions affect others, and that all students have the right to be happy, comfortable, and proud of the school that their families chose for them. We all work together to make Morningside a positive learning environment.

# The Morningside Code

## What makes Morningside Academy unique?

What makes Morningside Academy unique? Morningside is run on the twin engines of Behavior Analysis and Transactional Analysis. We don't focus on personality types or troubling personal histories. Decisions and interventions are based on observable behaviors. Students become aware of which behaviors are helpful to them and which behaviors may contribute to problems for them. The idea that our patterns of behavior in dealing with others are dynamic and in our control – and that we can change them as necessary to meet new situations and challenges –can be extremely empowering.

Visitors may notice the positive atmosphere of our school right away. This is closely tied to the underlying belief of Transactional Analysis that each person has a right to receive positive strokes and the responsibility to give positive strokes. A stroke refers back to the first interactions we have as a baby with our caregivers. In everyday usage, positive strokes encompass words, expressions, voice tone, and body language. Teachers and students work together to create a positive learning environment. We strive to increase the number of positive strokes to increase the likelihood of academic success. Below we will explore the unique features of Morningside, and discuss the expectations of teachers, students, parents, and guardians to bring these ideals to fruition.

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## **Observable Behaviors: antecedents, behaviors, and consequences**

In other settings, students may be called out for undesired behaviors, sometimes punished, and often given large amounts of negative attention. If students are not getting the positive attention they desire, they can come to rely on this predictable negative attention. The negative attention is the consequence of the student's behavior. This negative attention begins to reinforce the undesired behavior, and increase the probability of it happening again. Morningside teachers are trained to identify likely antecedents – events that are playing a role in a student's response, either positive or negative. Teachers strive to set up academically effective antecedents that will increase the likelihood that positive behaviors will occur. Desired positive behaviors are reinforced and students begin to recognize the positive consequences of those desired behaviors. Students often need to get used to a teacher's lack of attention to misbehavior, as well as the explicit and specific attention given to positive behaviors.

Students grow to appreciate this positive approach, and the expectation is that students also refrain from giving attention to and thus reinforcing, negative behaviors to their peers – and trust their teachers to recognize areas that need behavioral support. Teachers reinforce desired behaviors differentially. They might give more positive attention for a new positive response that is more difficult for a certain student or for a different set of behaviors for another student. In this way, everyone in the class experiences success, and stays on a comfortable learning curve. Students are often expected to act as allies as well, to help reinforce each other's positive behaviors.

## **Teachers as Behavioral Coaches**

Morningside is a process and skills-based program, rather than purely content driven. We have shown that the largest gains in test scores come not from memorizing content but honing learning skills, teaching comprehension strategies, and showing and practicing the concepts behind mathematical routines. In short we teach how to learn, before we teach what to learn. Rather than vague exhortations to try harder, write more, pay attention – students will receive specific instructions on student body language, where to focus, how to participate in discussions, and how to plan for assignments.

## **Teachers as Behavioral Coaches (cont.)**

Clear sightlines and strong observational talents are expected of Morningside teachers. Students are expected to be open to suggestions, and to meet teachers halfway when trying out new routines. The increased observation and the immediacy of teacher feedback take getting used to. Students may feel somewhat uncomfortable until they realize the progress they can make with timely interactions.

## **Behavioral Repertoires and Teacher/Student Partnership**

In Transactional Analysis, we categorize our behaviors into five different repertoires: Controlling Parent, leader and rulemaking behaviors; Nurturing Parent, caring and friendly behaviors; Adult, problem solving and exploring behaviors; Adapted Child, rule following behaviors; and Free Child, joyful and body soothing behaviors. We all exhibit these behaviors at various times, regardless of our age. There is not one ideal repertoire, rather teachers train students to recognize the repertoire they are using, and help students to make decisions regarding which repertoire is the best to use in any given situation. The teacher/student partnership changes and evolves as the student progresses through Morningside. When students are new to Morningside, teachers are using their Controlling Parent repertoires often, explaining rules and leading students through new routines. Students are expected to engage in their Adapted Child repertoires and follow new routines. If they are unable to do so at first, teachers are expected to provide positive behavioral support until new students are able to meet expectations. As students continue at Morningside, teachers continue to hone students learning skills, and expectations increase. Students begin to use their Controlling Parent, Nurturing Parent, and Adult repertoires more often as they navigate through daily lessons, peer coaching, group discussions, and problem solving. Students are expected to give positive strokes whenever possible, and be open to suggestions from behavior coaches on how to increase positive transactions and make them more likely to occur.

## **The Daily Support Card**

Communication with our students' families is of prime importance at Morningside. Students' progress and development are reported across four dimensions: academics, learning skills, organization, and citizenship. Teachers are expected to report on daily progress positively, specifically, and focus on observable behaviors. If any points are not earned, teachers need to state reasons clearly, and restate positive behavior expectations. Students are expected to own their behaviors, both negative and positive, and report on their Daily Support Card cooperatively and honestly with their parents. Students are expected to discuss their Support Card with their parents or guardians, celebrating their achievements and taking a problem solving approach to any missed opportunities. Parents and guardians are expected to discuss the Support Card with their children each day, placing most of the emphasis on the points earned and the daily successes, while acknowledging and encouraging any behavioral supports put in place, all from a problem-solving approach. In this spirit, parents and guardians, along with students should put a reward system based on positive nurturing family and social interactions to celebrate daily success. To support this, new parents and guardians are required to attend Support Card orientation in which home reward systems are explored and a positive team effort is supported and encouraged.

## **Precision Teaching: daily practice and daily success**

A large part of Morningside's success lies in first teaching foundation skills, using short timed practices to build fluency. Fluency is defined as performing a skill quickly and fluidly so that retention of a new skill is maintained across new situations and after practice has ceased. Quite simply, students engage in deliberate practice with constant feedback until they reach rates of correct responses that makes a skill automatic and second nature. No remembering necessary. Teachers are expected to carefully assess each student's entry skills, and give the students reachable daily goals so that daily success is celebrated and a positive atmosphere in the classroom is nurtured and maintained.

## **Precision Teaching: daily practice and daily success (cont.)**

Students are often pleasantly surprised at how easily fluency aims are reached. Teachers are expected to train students to keep track of progress using a tool called the Standard Celeration Chart. Even our youngest students can learn to record their scores and "drop dots" successfully. Students are expected to chart their progress accurately and honestly after each timing, and with the teacher's help, make plans for the next day. The importance of honest counting and charting is strongly emphasized so that accurate and attainable goals are set. Students are expected to ask for interventions if they are having trouble reaching their goals, and the teacher provides them in a timely and positive manner.

## **Data Based Decision Making: grouped according to skill, not age**

After extensive assessments at the beginning of the school year, students at Morningside are placed in the class with other students most similar to their entry behaviors and learning profiles. In these small classes of eight to twelve students, teachers are able to customize instruction as much as possible so that each student makes the most progress. Students may enter Morningside with one skill of a greater deficit, an area in which they have the most catching up to do. In this class a student might be with younger students. Conversely, if students are advanced in a given area, they may be placed with older students. Curriculum is chosen for its effectiveness at addressing the needs of each student's learning profile, not their specific grade level. Some programs operate effectively over multiple grade levels. This means that at times, students will come across the same program in different years at Morningside. Since Morningside is a process-based program rather than content-based, a student may be getting plenty of practice and skill building with a program they have seen before. That program has been selected because it is an ideal fit for a student's learning profile. Rather than complaining that they have experienced a program before, students are asked to trust initial placement and curriculum decisions and then show with their performance and data that they are ready to move on to a different program.