



Mindfulness in Schools

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Suddenly, everyone seems to be talking about mindfulness. I hear it talked about in my fitness classes, in classrooms, in professional meetings and in the line at the supermarket! It seemed like a good time to explore the practice, and learn a little more about its research base and application in schools.

What is mindfulness? According to Hooker & Fodor (2008), mindfulness is a very cognizant, purposeful way to be entirely aware of what is happening within us as well as around us, without judgement. Another way of defining it, is “paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment to moment” (Kabat-Zinn, 2003, p. 145). Mindfulness is learned and practiced through meditation and breathing exercises, during which mental awareness and experiencing the present moment are stressed.

The practice of mindfulness has seen an increase in use by mental health professionals because there is extensive research that suggests it can be quite beneficial in improving mental focus, easing anxiety and depression, and supporting emotional



regulation and stress (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). It has also been found to be effective in addressing chronic pain and disease, anxiety, depression, emotional stress, eating disturbances and sleeplessness. For example, the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society at UMass Medical School¹ has had over 6,000 doctors refer over 22,000 patients for mindfulness training. The Center reports that these patients experience a 38% reduction in medical symptoms, a 43% reduction in

psychological and emotional distress, and a 26% reduction in perceived stress.

Research on how mindfulness affects children in a school environment is challenging because of the diversity in implementation of the practice, the broad range of outcome measurements used and the varying quality of the studies (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz & Walach, 2014; Kuyken et al, (2013). Because of this it can be called a *promising practice* in education, but not an *evidence-based practice*.

There are a number of suggestive studies however. Mindful Schools, an organization that provides mindfulness training for adults, conducted a study in the 2011-2012

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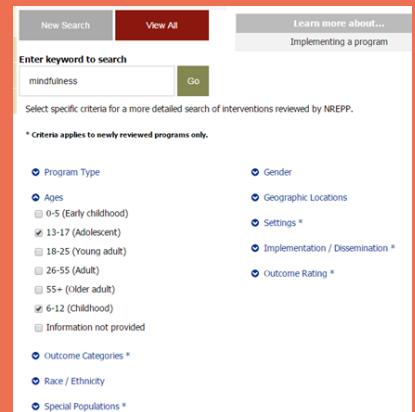


School Tool

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

The National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP) at the SAMHSA website is a great resource for learning about scientifically established behavioral health interventions. You can search the registry using keywords and filters to find and read about a wide range of interventions, like mindfulness, for improving student mental health outcomes.

Click here to check it out: <https://www.samhsa.gov/nrepp>



Mindfulness

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school year with the University of California, Davis. The study involved 937 children and 47 teachers in three Oakland public elementary schools. Students who were instructed in a mindfulness curriculum showed statistically significant greater improvements in their ability to pay attention and participate in class than did controls.

At the Robert W. Coleman Elementary School in Baltimore, staff decided to refer students with behavioral challenges to the “Mindful Moment” room to reflect on what happened and spend 15 minutes doing mindfulness exercises rather than punishing them with detention or suspension. This practice resulted in zero suspensions for the 2016-2017 school year. Researchers from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Penn State University (Knox, 2013) are in the process of studying the effect the program has on children’s moods, relationships with peers and teachers and emotional self-regulation.

After examining these types of studies more carefully, schools might decide to pilot and evaluate mindfulness practices in their school.

Hooker & Fodor (2008) caution that mindfulness and meditation should be initially discussed with students as they may have questions and/or misunderstandings. Once any misconceptions are cleared up it is important to structure the environment so that the children will be successful. They recommend short initial meditations until the students become familiar with the activities and building in mindfulness practice every day or as often as possible. While some schools set a few minutes in the morning and at the end of the day when everyone practices mindfulness, Hooker & Fodor suggest that students be taught to be mindful throughout the school day, for instance, when they walk, eat, move, transition, and interact with adults and other students. The goal is for children to learn to use these mindfulness strategies when they need to, at any time during the day. Additionally, they suggest that facilitated group discussions on mindfulness where children share their experiences enhance the practice and help focus their awareness across situations.

So can mindfulness really help students? Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help ease anxiety, depression, and pain in adults. From my reading thus far, the act of teaching students to breathe deeply and to focus

their attention seems to have the potential of helping students improve attention and emotional regulation and calm themselves in challenging situations. Because there is not yet an extensive amount of research on the impact of teaching mindfulness to children in schools, a teacher implementing this promising practice should assess the impact on students in his or her classroom by carefully and intentionally collecting data on student behavior and learning.

¹Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society. UMass Medical School, <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>

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- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2): 144-156.
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- Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S & Walach, H (2014). Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Front Psychol*, 5: 603.



Come Learn with us at our upcoming Regional Trainings



Instructional Practices

October

- Explicit Direct Instruction for Non-District Settings (3 Day), 10/12, 11/16 & 1/11
- Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disabilities, 10/18
- Special Education 101 for ENL Teachers, 10/19
- Explicit Direct Instruction—The Key to Effective Lessons (2 Day), 10/26 & 11/2
- Literacy for ELLs with Disabilities: What's Different?, 10/30
- Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Evaluations, 10/31

November

- Understanding Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, 11/9
- Literacy for ELLs with Disabilities: What's Different?, 11/15
- Language Acquisition vs. Learning Disabilities, 11/28

December

- Understanding Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, 12/15

Behavior & Discipline Supports

October

- FBA-BIP Refresher, 10/11
- ***Invitation Only*** PBIS Tier 1 / Universal Team Training (3 Day), 10/13, 11/8 & 11/30
WAITLIST
- PBIS Coaches' Forum, 10/20
- PBIS New Coaches' Basic Training, 10/20
- PBIS Tier 2 Overview, 10/20

November

- Team Implementation Guidance for Social & Behavioral Supports, 11/1
- Function –Based Thinking: Making Sense of Preschoolers Challenging Behaviors, 11/17

December

- Team Implementation Guidance for Social & Behavioral Supports, 12/6
- Function –Based Thinking: Making Sense of Challenging Behaviors for School-Age Students, 12/14

Leadership

October

- CSE Roundtable, 10/19

December

- CSE Roundtable, 12/14 ***WAITLIST***
- CPSE Colloquium, 12/21
- Forum for Administrators: Social and Behavioral Systems in Schools, 12/21

Individualized Educational Planning & the CSE Process

October

- ***Invitation Only*** Student Directed IEPs (5 Day), 10/25, 12/21, 1/24, 3/14 & 5/17
- IEP Institute (4 Day), 10/24, 10/31, 11/8 & 11/15

November

- IEPs for ELLs, 11/2
- IEP Study Group, 11/28

December

- Testing Accommodations, 12/4

Transition Systems

October

- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 10/12
- Diploma and Credential Options for Students with Disabilities, 10/12
WAITLIST
- Transition Planning (Middle School and Beyond) for ELLs Who Have IEPs, 10/17
- Transition Institute: Quality IEPs and Indicator 13, 10/20
- Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential (AM), 10/27
- CDOS Credential: Implementing Program Options (PM), 10/27

November

- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 11/9
- The Forum: Adult Agencies that Serve Individuals with Multiple Disabilities, 11/14
- TELLs (Transition for English Language Learners) Consortium and Book Study Group (4 Day), 11/20, 12/19, 1/29 & 2/26
- Transition Specialist Network, 11/30

December

- Putnam County Transition Consortium, 12/14

Community Events

From PNW BOCES

www.pnwboces.org/catalog

- Dyslexia Awareness and Simulation Session, 10/10
- Identifying & Managing School Refusal Behavior in School Settings, 10/10
- Introduction to Mindfulness in the Classroom, 10/14
- The Writing Revolution: An Overview featuring Dr. Judith Hochman, 10/27

From SW BOCES

www.swboces.org

- The Writing Revolution: An Overview featuring Dr. Judith Hochman, 10/23
- Cultivating a Growth Mindset in the Reader's Workshop, Grades 3-5, begins 10/24
- Why Question? Constructing Questions That Engage and Inspire Learning, 10/27
- The Ins and Outs of Differentiated Instruction—ELA, 10/30

From Rockland BOCES

www.rocklandboces.org

- Mindsets in the Classroom, 10/26

From PILS

- Financial Security for Persons Unable to Support Themselves, Denise Green, 845-228-7457 x1102

From WIHD

- Early Childhood Inclusion Institute 2017, Irossi@wihd.org

View our Training Calendar and Register at rsetasc.pnwboces.org/events/



BRIGHT SPOT!

This month's Bright Spots again come from our year-end survey. This time we looked at the responses of the teachers and administrators from multiple districts, including Carmel, Port Chester, White Plains, New Rochelle, Southern Westchester BOCES, Byram Hills, Eastchester, Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES, Dobbs Ferry, Putnam Valley and the PARC Preschool, who attended the RSE-TASC Student-Directed IEP series last year.

What were students able to achieve?

Educators described some powerful impacts on students, including:

- * Students developed a better understanding of their strengths, needs and goals and took ownership of their IEP development.
- * Students changed their view of teachers and the school; they now feel they have control of their education instead of it "just happening" to them.
- * Students and their IEP teams created much more reflective IEPs with a more accurate focus on student needs.

What practices or systems made this possible?

Educators implemented more student-directed practices, including:

- * Students were more directly involved in the creation of IEPs and in CSE meetings; at one high school, every student presented on his/her strengths, needs, interests and future plans at the annual meeting.
- * Staff used templates to develop accurate goals and measurement processes that were shared with students.
- * Transition and graduation information was shared at meetings and systematic procedures for developing coordinated transition activities were put in place for all students, starting at age 14.

What can we learn from this?

Principle 1 of the NYS Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities, i.e., *Students engage in self-advocacy and are involved in determining their own educational goals and plans*, begins by fully engaging all students in the creation of their own educational plans. It can be done!

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