

# Mindfulness in Schools

## Impacting Teacher Wellness and Student Achievement

“A human being is a part of the whole, called by us ‘universe’, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty....the striving for such attainment is in itself a part of the liberation, and a foundation for inner security.”

*Albert Einstein, New York Times, March 29, 1972*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mindfulness meditation is a time-tested, scientifically-validated, means of increasing focus, calm, and mental clarity. Systematically practicing mindfulness can increase the speed of cognitive functioning, increase memory, increase powers of attention, and help in managing and ultimately reducing our stress responses. It helps develop mental resilience to stress and other negative emotions. Studies have shown that mindfulness meditation strengthens the areas of the brain that are associated with well-being and decreases activity in the portions of the brain associated with fear and anxiety.

There is solid evidence documenting that developing mindfulness increases happiness, reduces stress, and helps people think more clearly and, therefore, perform better. Not only are there mental and stress reduction benefits, but mindfulness has been clinically documented to reduce blood pressure and aid in managing chronic pain, and inflammatory disorders such as psoriasis and colitis.

Large corporations have already recognized mindfulness practice as a high-performance tool for both senior managers and line staff, and are spending more training and professional development dollars on customized mindfulness training programs

### THE GROWING PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS IN SCHOOLS

Mindfulness has been proven to be particularly effective in social/ emotional development, test preparation and general physical health, but the benefits of a consistent mindfulness practice touch every aspect of a person's life.

Mindfulness training is growing rapidly in education as a way of improving focus and managing stress in students and teachers alike.

Mindfulness for children means empowering them with the tools to identify and regulate their emotional life. Mindfulness is linked to increased Emotional Intelligence. It also helps develop brain structure in a beneficial way. Furthermore, it can increase cognition speeds and help reduce rumination. Mindfulness has proven beneficial for ADHD, as well as for developing clarity and quietude. It is also be used in sports and other stress filled environments for enhancing and sustaining “ peak performance”. For children, accomplishing only 5 minutes of stillness every day has benefits. The simple training instructions and relatively short daily time commitment allows for ease in incorporating the training into a daily agenda.

While some mindfulness programs have largely focused on delivering meditation instruction directly to students, we believe the first place to start is with teachers and administrators. Leading by example is the best.

### **TEACHER WELLNESS FIRST**

More than ever before, teachers today are called upon to be skilled instructors, leaders and caregivers. Staying focused and energetic can be challenging in light of extended school days and academic years, the pressure of standardized tests, and working with each child's own strengths and challenges. We have developed a mindfulness based training program as a path to teacher self-care, which for many teachers can ultimately change their relationship with the classroom entirely.

### **PILOT PROGRAM SUMMARY**

We are seeking a partner to pilot our mindfulness-training program in schools, which would begin with teacher self-care. This training would include approximately 3 weeks in which Andrew would lead teachers in a brief meditative exercise on a weekly basis and be available for 1:1 meetings and guidance. At the end of this period, we would ask that teachers provide feedback as to the effectiveness of their own mindfulness practice and the curriculum.

### **NEXT STEPS**

In order to determine if this opportunity is right for you and/or your school, Andrew will deliver a 20-minute overview on mindfulness training at a teacher staff meeting. If there is further interest, this brief introduction would be followed by a 90 minute introductory session. In this introductory session, we will discuss what mindfulness is, the scientific research that supports the benefits, and the impact in schools to date. This session will also include a brief 5-15 minute group meditation.

### **ABOUT ANDREW SCHEFFER**



Andrew has been a dedicated practitioner of meditation for more than 20 years. After graduating from The Johns Hopkins University, he spent 8 years in training and study with the world-renowned mindfulness teacher Sayadaw U Pandita. After 8 years training he returned to the US to earn an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, where he initiated a student meditation group. For 15 years following his graduation, Andrew remained dedicated to meditation while building a successful career in Private Banking and Financial Services. Andrew has spread the tested and time endured teachings from Myanmar (Burma) through introductory meditation sessions and ongoing training for colleagues and corporations.

### **CONTACT**

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## RECENT PRESS AND RESEARCH

### Mindfulness for Test Performance Enhancement

#### **Brief Mindfulness Training May Boost Test Scores, Working Memory**

Psychological Science, Hoffman, Jan (May 2014)

#### **How Meditation May Boost Your Test Scores**

NY Times April 3, 2013

#### **Brief Mindfulness Intervention on Math Test Anxiety and Exam Scores**

Niss, Laura (August 2012) University of Colorado

### Mindfulness and Teachers

#### **Mindfulness for teachers: A pilot study to assess effects on stress, burnout, and teaching efficacy**

Results suggest that mindfulness may be a promising intervention, with participants showing significant reductions in psychological symptoms and burnout, improvements in observer-rated classroom organization and performance on a computer task of affective attentional bias, and increases in self-compassion.

Flook, L., Goldberg, S. B., Pinger, L., Bonus, K., & Davidson, R. J. (2013). Mind, Brain, and Education, 7(3), 182-195.

#### **Improving classroom learning environments by cultivating awareness and resilience in education (CARE): Results of a randomized controlled trial.**

The CARE program resulted in significant improvements in teacher well-being, efficacy, burnout/time-related stress, and mindfulness compared with controls. Evaluation data showed that teachers viewed CARE as a feasible, acceptable, and effective method for reducing stress and improving performance.

Jennings, P. A., Frank, J. L., Snowberg, K. E., Coccia, M. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2013). School Psychology Quarterly. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/spq0000035

#### **Mindfulness Training and Reductions in Teacher Stress and Burnout: Results From Two Randomized, Waitlist-Control Field Trials**

Teachers randomized to MT showed greater mindfulness, focused attention and working memory capacity, and occupational self-compassion, as well as lower levels of occupational stress and burnout at post-program and follow-up, than did those in the control condition.

Roeser, R. W., Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Jha, A., Cullen, M., Wallace, L., Wilensky, R., Oberle, E., Thomson, K., Taylor, C., & Harrison, J. (2013, April 29). *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0032093

#### **Mindfulness training and teachers' professional development: An emerging area of research and practice.**

This article focuses on how mindfulness training (MT) programs for teachers, by cultivating mindfulness and its application to stress management and the social-emotional demands of teaching, represent emerging forms of teacher professional development (PD) aimed at improving teaching in public schools.

Roeser, R.W., Skinner, E., Beers, J., & Jennings, P.A. (2012). *Child Development Perspectives*, 6, 167-173.

#### **Mindfulness training for teachers changes the behavior of their preschool students.**

Results showed that decreases in the students' challenging behaviors and increases in their compliance with teacher requests began during mindfulness training for the teachers and continued to change following the training.

Singh, N. N., Lancioni, G. E., Winton, A. S., Karazsia, B. T., & Singh, J. (2013). *Research in Human Development*, 10(3), 211-233.

## Mindfulness and Administrators

### **Principals Responding to Constant Pressure: Finding a Source of Stress Management.**

Mindfulness meditation, as a stress management intervention, provides the theoretical background for this article; the scientific evidence concerning benefits of mindfulness meditations are reviewed. Finally, the author presents suggestions for the prevention and reduction of stress for principals.

Wells, C. M. (2013). *NASSP Bulletin*, 0192636513504453.

## Publications

### **Contemplative practices and mental training: Prospects for American education.**

Davidson, R. J., & the Mind and Life Education Research Network (2012). *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 146-153.

### **Interventions shown to aid executive function development in children 4 to 12 years old.**

Diamond, A., & Lee, K. (2011). *Science*, 333(6045), 959-964.

### **Activities and programs that improve children's executive functions.**

Diamond, A. (2012). *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 21, 335-341. NIHMS602709

### **Nurturing mindfulness in children and youth: Current state of research.**

Greenberg, M. T., & Harris, A. R. (2012). *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 161-166.

### **Some Reflections on the Origins of MBSR, Skillful Means, and the Trouble with Maps.**

Kabat-Zinn J. (2011). *Contemporary Buddhism*, 12(1), 281-306

### **Integrating mindfulness training into K-12 education: Fostering the resilience of teachers and students.**

Meiklejohn, J., Phillips, C., Freedman, M. L., Griffin, M. L., Biegel, G., Roach, A., . . . Saltzman, A. (2012). *Mindfulness*, 3(4), 291-307.

### **Feasibility and preliminary outcomes of a school-based mindfulness intervention for urban youth.**

Mendelson, T., Greenberg, M. T., Dariotis, J. K., Gould, L. F., Rhoades, B. L., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 38(7), 985-994.

### **School-based mindfulness instruction for urban male youth: A small randomized controlled trial.**

Sibinga, E. M. S., Perry-Parrish, C., Chung, S. E., Johnson, S. B., Smith, M., & Ellen, J. M. (2013). *Preventive Medicine*, 57(6), 799-801.

### **Mindful awareness, mindfulness, and neural integration.**

Siegel, D. J. (2009). *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 37(2), 137-158.

### **The potential benefits of mindfulness training in early childhood: A developmental social cognitive neuroscience perspective.**

Zelazo, P. D., & Lyons, K. E. (2012). *Child Development Perspectives*, 6(2), 154-160.

## Articles and Press

### **Low-income schools see big benefits in teaching mindfulness.**

Schwartz, K. (2014, January 17). KQED Mind/Shift.

### **Should Schools Teach Kids to Meditate?,**

Explores the use of mindfulness in schools.

The Atlantic

### **Use this technique to reduce student anxiety and help students succeed.**

Brief article by a teacher and member of the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) about her use of mindfulness in the classroom.

### **The Mindful Revolution.**

A preview of the article is available, but a subscription is required to access the full text.

TIME Magazine online article

### **Mindfulness makes a difference in the lives of urban youth (*Issue Brief*)**

Additional ResourcesCenter for Adolescent Health. (2011, Winter). . Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

### **Researching the relationship between stress and learning: Annotated bibliography.**

Wrightson, C. (2014). School of Education, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD.