

For Immediate Release
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Mindful Education Information Session

Ripon, WI -- The Ripon Area School District will be hosting an informational session about Mindfulness on Wednesday, October 10 at 6:30 p.m. in the Ripon High School Community Room. Featured speakers include Ms. Lindsay Loewe and Ms. Linda Richards from Collective Wellness.

Staff at Barlow Park Elementary and Journey Charter School are expanding their social emotional learning curriculum to include mindfulness in the 2018-2019 school year. While there are many different definitions of mindfulness, the definition used by our schools is: paying attention to the present moment with kindness and curiosity and then choosing a response. One of the ironies of education is asking students to “pay attention” and “tune-in” without actually teaching them *how* to do that. The practice of mindfulness teaches students *how* to pay attention which enhances both academic and social-emotional learning.

According to the APA’s Stress in America survey, overall stress levels are increasing, especially in young people. “Chronic stress — stress that interferes with your ability to function normally over an extended period — is becoming a public health crisis.” Many students experience some level of stress. Children grow up in a fast-paced, media-saturated, multi-tasking world. Some children must learn to survive in extremely challenging home environments and traumatic life circumstances. The toxic amounts of stress for young learners frequently inhibits their ability to learn academics as well as social-emotional learning targets.

Dr. Jeanne Lyke, MD and district physician shared the following, “Anecdotally I have seen mind- body training improve anxiety and self-regulation in children and adolescents. The effects are most apparent in those with a history of past trauma or negative experiences. Unfortunately this is becoming more common in the population we serve.”

The national trend is reflected in Ripon where learners as young as 4 years old have been diagnosed by medical doctors and psychiatrists with depression, anxiety, ADHD and other mental health disorders. In 2017, Barlow Park teachers completed a universal behavior screener. Of the 28 learners identified (K-2) as

possibly at risk for internalizing or externalizing behaviors, 16 were identified as hyperactive and impulsive and 17 were identified as having conduct problems. Studies now show the neurological effects of stress. Practicing mindfulness strengthens the connections to the rational/thinking part of the brain - the prefrontal cortex which helps it “come online faster” in stressful situations. The old pathways to the fight/flight part of the brain - the amygdala - are used less and therefore weaker.

Dr. Karin Suesser, a licensed clinical psychologist in the Ripon area specializing in ADHD, trauma, anxiety, and anger management, explains mindfulness as, “... “concentration training” – we are literally teaching children how to pay attention better to what is going on right now, instead of “zoning out” or “acting out” when they feel frustrated, anxious, or bored. Regular mindfulness training has been found to actually strengthen those brain areas that are involved in the development of self-control – which is one of the most important predictors of both academic and social success. So it’s not surprising that there is now a growing body of scientific research showing that teaching mindfulness to children can improve concentration, learning, classroom behavior, and even standardized test scores.”

At Barlow Park Elementary and Journey Charter School, integration of mindfulness will begin with second grade classrooms. Learners will first explore awareness of body and listening, then mindful breathing, and finally the act of heartfulness - wishing others well and sending kind thoughts. Learning facilitators will also be supported by the Coordinator for Mindful Education and Mental Health. Mrs. Gianopoulos works with staff to establish and implement calming corners in the classrooms, provide staff development and resources, and to create self-care plans for staff to improve their own mental health.

As shared by Tanya Sanderfoot, BPJ principal, “We look forward to integrating mindfulness into our social-emotional learning curriculum. Bringing mindfulness into the classrooms will reinforce to students that their emotional needs are important too. Allowing students to have ownership of their own minds, bodies, and feelings will have the power to transform the way they learn and give them incredible tools for success in life.”

For more information, please contact Superintendent, Dr. Mary Whitrock, at whitrockm@ripon.k12.wi.us or 748-4600 with any questions.

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