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**From:** Pickell, Russell  
**Sent:** Friday, September 14, 2018 10:22 AM  
**To:** Staff  
**Subject:** Friday Focus

Good morning everyone and Happy Friday!

I want to compliment everyone on a great start to the school year. Despite some warmer than needed weather on the first two days, everyone was able to get into familiar routines and patterns and you were able to promote a caring, learning atmosphere right from the start. I was able to observe 8th grade lunch, a fifth/kindergarten lunch combo at Huntington, as well as many scattered classroom visits, and you all looked like we were in mid year form! Incredible! When I mentioned this to one of our Forest Teachers, her response was, "When everyone has the same expectations, it's easy." There's really nothing else to say.

In keeping with our focus of meeting the academic, social, and emotional needs of EVERY child, I have attached two short articles that I hope will find useful. The meditation article supports many of our PBIS efforts and philosophies; and the Leveling the Playing Field article gives some good insight on working with intrinsic students. I hope you find both useful.

I am asking that everyone keep Mr. Berlin in their thoughts and prayers today, and while he is on medical leave. I also want to thank everyone for stepping in and helping out in his absence. Mrs. Said-Wright is doing an awesome job in the interim, but greatly relies on all of you for assistance and support as we continue to provide for our students. In times of crisis, a great team will come together and overcome, a bad team will fall apart. I am so thankful for the team we have!

A group of community members, parents and employees has been working hard with the Board of Education to prioritize our greatest facility needs and structure millage proposals to address them. The result of this work is two millage proposals for the November election. The first is a bond proposal resulting in a zero (0) increase in taxes generating \$12,950,000 and the second is a 2 mill sinking fund. You can see the details of the proposals on our website. We are working on uploading some easier to read and eye friendly documents, so stay tuned.

Please familiarize yourselves as much as possible on these proposals and the benefits they will provide for our children. The community will rely on you for information, as they should, since no-one knows our needs as well as you! In addition, our maintenance staff and the bond committee would greatly appreciate your assistance so if you are aware of badly worn, damaged or stained portions of our facilities (eg, stained carpet or ceiling tiles, worn desks, rusted doors) please take a photo and send to me for compilation and placement on the website. A picture is worth a thousand words!

As an FYI, there is a group of bond committee members meeting with the mayor and city council members this afternoon to promote awareness and gather support for our millage proposals. Board President Bohr as well as bond committee members have been having individual conversations with city leaders and have reported positive results, so we are hopeful that we will have support from city officials for November. I will keep you posted of the outcome of this meeting and rely other ways that we can support these initiatives and each other.

Thank you for all you do for our children. Have a great Friday and an awesome weekend!

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*ARRGH!*

Academics, Responsibility, Respect, Growth, Honor.

## Meditation leads to better behavior and more focused learners

Something as simple and as inexpensive as a few minutes of deep breathing can help children better control their emotions—and their behavior. But this only works if students practice mindfulness daily, and at McKinley-Brighton Elementary School in Syracuse, New York, they do—for 30 minutes at the start of each day of summer school.

“When you have high poverty in a district, that brings chronic trauma from students’ life experiences,” says Janel E. Milana, the summer school principal. “Mindfulness changes the environment in the classroom. Kids can talk through their emotions instead of yelling and fighting and causing more trauma.”

During that 30-minute opening period, students also practice yoga poses, and teachers read books about mindfulness that teach children how to recognize their behaviors as choices.

Children who have to be removed

from class visit the Student Support Center, wherein a teaching assistant leads them through mindfulness exercises or yoga poses before discussing behavioral problems. McKinley-Brighton also has created a “mindful room” for this school year, in which students can relax in soft chairs and with special, weighted blankets.

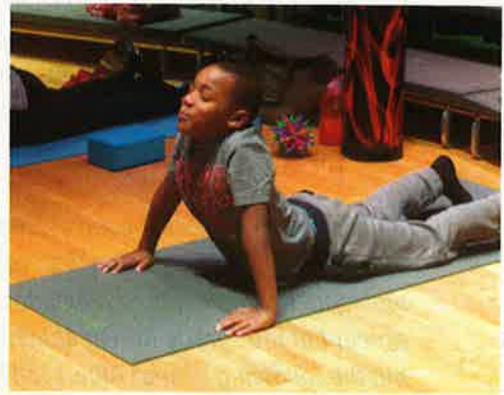
There’s real science behind mindfulness, Milana adds. Yoga and breathing help a person shift their thinking from the more emotional part of the brain, the amygdala, to the more strategic prefrontal cortex. “This summer, I have seen increased engagement,” says Milana. “I’ve seen happier, calmer kids who are ready, focused and interested in what they’re learning.”

### How children cope with adversity

With guidance and staff from the non-profit Holistic Life Foundation, several Baltimore-area schools have replaced detention with meditation. Instead of going to the principal’s office, students who have acted out visit a “mindful moment” room. Here, a staff member will let them talk uninterrupted about their feelings. The staff member then initiates breathing exercises, meditation and silent reflection.

As the school year progresses, fewer students visit the mindful moment room because they learn to self-regulate their emotions in class when they sense stress coming on, says Atman Smith, a cofounder of the Holistic Life Foundation.

“It gives kids tools to navigate the ups and down of the human experience, whether it’s a heightened emotional state or the life-or-death situations that happen to kids in urban communities,” Smith says. “Through practice and being mindful, our kids have been able to keep a positive attitude and excel.”



**FINDING INNER PEACE**—Students in summer school at McKinley-Brighton Elementary in Syracuse, New York, practice mindfulness and yoga for 30 minutes every day.

### It works for teachers, too

Punishing a traumatized student for acting out is the wrong approach, says Patricia Jennings, an associate professor in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia and author of *Mindfulness for Teachers: Simple Skills for Peace and Productivity in the Classroom*.

Schools can change a punitive culture by training teachers to practice mindfulness and meditation, Jennings says. A study of more than 200 elementary school teachers in New York City showed reduced stress after these educators learned meditation and mindfulness techniques, Jennings adds.

“When you’re teaching, you have to manage emotions without any privacy,” she says. “Teachers should calmly express how they’re feeling and model for students how to calm down by taking a few deep breaths instead of raising their voice. It’s like turning down a thermostat.”

—Matt Zalaznick

### Elementary mindfulness

What does mindfulness look like as elementary students age? Betsy Hanger, an instructor with the non-profit Mindful Schools who works as a community mentor in several Los Angeles USD classrooms, describes two scenarios:

**Kindergarten:** Children in a mindfulness circle take three deep breaths. The teacher guides them in imagining they are dolphins riding waves. Students can also discuss how they used mindfulness the previous day.

**Sixth grade:** Older students, especially those learning English, need extra time to talk. After three minutes of quiet breathing, the teacher starts a discussion of a current event. All students should have the opportunity to express themselves.

## Leveling the Playing Field for Introverted Students

In this *Mindshift* article, Deborah Farmer Kris says many introverts don't realize that temperament is rooted in genetics, with differences emerging in infancy and early childhood. Schools tend to be highly stimulating environments that favor extroverts, and quieter children frequently hear injunctions like "Just speak up" and "Come out of your shell." All this gives introverts a sense that there's something wrong with them, and they can feel "overlooked, undervalued, and overstimulated," says Heidi Kasevich, director of education for Quiet Revolution, which grew out of Susan Cain's best-selling book about introverts.

What can teachers do to give introverted students a fair shake? Kris suggests administering a survey at the beginning of the school year to identify who those students are and then structuring classes to allow all students to excel. Specifically:

• *Make space for quiet reflection.* Teachers can take stock of the amount of time they give to active discourse versus silent reflection and individual work. If the balance is more toward the former, teachers might build in:

- Opportunities for one-to-one conversations like think-pair-share;
- Asking students to respond to questions by jotting ideas on a sticky note before speaking;
- Using "one-minute papers" mid-class for students to reflect on what they're learning – posing questions like, *What's challenging me? Why is this relevant? How can I connect this to something else I'm learning?*
- Counting to ten before calling on students; this ups the complexity of responses from all students and is especially helpful to introverts.
- Asking for purposeful silence as students consider an image, a painting, or a passage from a book.

All this helps because introverted students do better conversing in small groups, thinking before sharing aloud, weighing options before making decisions, assessing risk before acting, and recharging in a quiet, calm environment.

• *Consider the physical environment.* "Think about providing niches for quiet reading or mind-wandering," suggests Kris. "Explore inclusive lunchroom and playground options, such as a coloring table or open library time."

• *Provide context and previews.* Abrupt demands and unexpected challenges can be jarring to introverted students, so teachers might consider ways of giving them a longer runway:

- In elementary classrooms, a posted daily schedule;
- In secondary classrooms, a display of the sequence of curriculum units for the year;
- An essential question on the board as class starts;
- An agenda before a meeting;

- A thorough preview of a unit, project, or assessment.
- *Be sensitive to language.* Feedback to students or their parents can convey negative judgments about introverted students – for example, “He needs to speak up more in class discussions.” This comment might be reframed to emphasize strengths: “He is an insightful student who thinks deeply and thoughtfully before responding.”
  - *Stretch the comfort zone.* The trick is tying actions the student wants or needs to take to the student’s passions and interests – for example, an introverted high-school student who is interested in sustainability might be encouraged to become a club officer or give a speech. “Keep your mission in mind,” the teacher might say to the student prior to the speech. “Go to the auditorium beforehand to practice, and remember a time when you spoke with confidence and conviction.”
  - *Build in inclusive group work.* “If you simply put kids into groups with no training, a minority of members will likely do the majority of the talking,” says Kris. “Train students in techniques such as brainwriting and design thinking. Establish group norms for inclusive conversation and stick to them.”

“Six Strategies to Help Introverts Thrive at School and Feel Understood” by Deborah Farmer Kris in *Mindshift*, August 12, 2018, <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/51811/six-strategies-to-help-introverts-thrive-at-school-and-feel-understood>