

**Weekly Message from the Principal**  
**Mary Ann McQueen**  
**February 10, 2017**



**SAINT MARK**  
**S C H O O L**

Dear Parents,

We have been very lucky to have Charley Allen visiting many of our classrooms each week to conduct mindfulness sessions with our students. Charley set forth the perfect ground work for our mindfulness initiative, including introducing us to Cary Saltgaver, an educator who specializes in bringing mindfulness to schools and students of all ages.

Yesterday, Cary began a sixteen week program in grades TK-6. This is very exciting! It provides an opportunity for students and faculty to experience this program and for the teachers to learn how to conduct these exercises/meditation/mindfulness activities with students now and in the future.

The students love these sessions! They are integrating the practices and we know that over time they will have a profound effect.

Cary will be sending updates each week so that you know what the curriculum is focused on and can discuss it with your child.

Cary was trained to do this work at an institute focused on mindfulness in schools in the Bay Area. The materials/resources that we are using that come out of this institute are:

***The Way of Mindful Education*** by Daniel Rechtschaffen and ***The Mindful Education Workbook - Lessons for Teaching Mindfulness to Students*** by Daniel Rechtschaffen. Both are available on Amazon Smile (a plug for Amazon Smile as it benefits SMS if you enter the SMS Amazon Smile portal at Amazon.com)

To quote from the book about the effect of these practices on students:

"The field of mindfulness in education is young, but the research is already confirming what thousands of teachers and students are learning firsthand. For teachers, mindfulness reduces stress, helps them focus, and makes them happy (Roeser et al, 2013). Students are more emotionally regulated and attentive, and their learning improves. The classrooms are more peaceful, there are fewer conflicts, and kids like each other more (Zoogman et al, 2014).

Of course you can see how this program is a perfect complement to our Catholic school focus on peace building, respect for self and others and a deep belief in the power of prayer and spirituality. Many religious faiths practice mindfulness - meditation! Mindfulness also has to do with being open-minded, something that schools want to cultivate - central to learning is open-mindedness!

Many parents have shared their enthusiasm for this program and interest in it. So, we will keep you updated!

Sincerely,

Mary Ann McQueen

**St. Mark School**  
**February 9, 2017**  
**Mindfulness**

"All of our thoughts – ideas – are traceable to a sensation, an encounter with the world that leaves an impression upon the mind." □□ Kilroy J. Oldster

**Appreciations**

Thank you Charley Allen and Tara Thomas for connecting me with this beautiful school.

Thank you Mary Ann McQueen for our ongoing communication on how to bring these practices to the staff, students, and families at St. Mark School.

Thank you teachers for opening up your classrooms and sharing your students with me! I thoroughly enjoyed my time in each of your classrooms.

**What is Mindfulness?**

We started with an inquiry question, "What is Mindfulness?" There was no right or wrong answer. Here are some of their words...

**TK**

When people love you

Good stuff

Share

Caring with other people

Being calm, slowing down

**K**

Calm

Being kind

Being loving

Relaxing

Visualizing

Peace, relaxing

Meditating, peaceful, quiet

**1st Grade**

Relaxed and calm, chase away your blues

When you're frustrated or sad, calm yourself down

Relaxing and being calm

Calm down

Meditate

Calm and relaxed

Calm and knowing what's inside

**2nd Grade**

Relaxing

Calm

Thinking about stuff

Brain full

Full mind

Very smart

**3rd Grade**

What's going on inside your body

Peaceful and calm

Quiet, no one bothering you

Relax and stay calm

Brain more powerful

Calming down

Comfortable position

Relaxing your mind

#### **4th Grade**

Meditation, breath and current moment

Not thinking about what's going on in your mind

Shut everything down, breathe and relax

Focusing on your breath, calm

Calm, no stress

Relax, focus on your breathing

#### **5th Grade**

Think about one thing, picture it

Mindful of your surroundings

Relax, picture something you like

Taking a moment out of the day, breathe

Peaceful inside

Keeping calm

#### **6th Grade**

Calm and relaxed

Paying attention to what's going on in your own mind

Relaxation, no interruptions

Clearing your mind, peaceful

Aware of everything around you

Zone out, get into a better place

Mind at peace, no disturbance, happiness

Our first experience of mindfulness was playing the shake still game. Shake, shake, shake...STILL! (Similar to dance and freeze). We sat down and put on our mindfulness bodies by sitting up tall and proud while feeling relaxed at the same time. We explored what happens when we get totally still and totally quiet (10-30 seconds depending on the class). What did you notice?

"My breath, my heartbeat, I feel tired, the other classroom, people talking, the crows, a car, the notification on a phone"

\*Mindfulness is something that shows us what is happening right here, right now.

### **Embodiment Lessons**

Embodiment lessons help students feel safe and secure in their own bodies. Students need to feel safe and secure before they can learn, work together, and gain emotional regulation. We start by creating a safe space where students feel comfortable and relaxed in their bodies.

### **Language of the Body**

The language of sensation in the body is the foundation of mindfulness. Students learn the language of the body by exploring their own bodies. Students learn how to identify physical sensations and feelings. We can experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations, and learn to approach these sensations with a calm curiosity. To cultivate impulse control, emotional regulation, and attention, we need to learn the language of our bodies.

### **Sensation Exploration**

Our second experience of mindfulness was going on a sensation exploration. We talked about how if we go to another country, we need to learn the language to get around. If we go to the country of our bodies, we need to learn the language to get around. We need to learn the language of sensations and feelings. When we are more aware of our bodies, we will be better at anything we use our bodies for (sports, dancing, skateboarding, biking, hiking, etc.)

Let's start with our hand. Hold up your hand, look at it like you've never looked at it before. Look at the color of it, the shape of it, the lines running through it. Close your eyes. How do you know it's still there?

"Because I can feel it"

Let's create more sensations with our hand. Blow on your hand, shake your hand, massage your hand. What sensations do you feel?

"Cold, warm, hot, sweaty, tingling, tickling, fizzing, soft, hard, squishy"

### **Body Scan (6th grade)**

There is no homework for mindfulness. There is only how you carry the lessons into your life and into the world. When you walk outside, when you play a game, when you go to sleep at night...notice what sensations you feel.

Next week we are going to "play mindfulness" by connecting our breath to movement.

With gratitude,

Cary Saltsgaver

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