Mindfulness is a committed, concerted, targeted practice — a life skill. While pausing for a few deep breaths may make you feel better in the moment, practicing and training regularly will allow you to achieve long lasting results, brain health, and that calmer, less reactive place of being. Just as you would not tell someone who wanted to be physically healthy to take a five minute walk to achieve solid results, you would not expect physiological well-being from a few deep breaths.

Skeptics beware: once thought of as a new age idea, scientific data is establishing that mindfulness is as an effective and credible wellness tool. A growing body of research is providing actionable data that institutions, organizations, and corporations can apply. An experimental study conducted in Washington D.C. linked reduced violent crime rates with participation in meditation programs. A report from the National Association of School Psychologists states that, "The research that began more than 40 years ago is growing in quantity and sophistication. It confirms that mindfulness strategies..."
counteract the reactive behavior and short-term memory loss caused by stress.” Even the United States Marines are doing it.

MINDFULNESS IN GOVERNMENT & CORPORATE SETTINGS
The U.S. Marines, U.S. Veterans, Seattle Seahawks, Google, General Mills, and Aetna are among the reputable organizations that have identified how beneficial mindfulness is for their members and employees. US Congressman Tim Ryan (D - Ohio), a member of the House Appropriations Committee, the House Budget Committee, and author of A Mindful Nation, brought mindfulness practices to Capitol Hill through his Quiet Time Caucus, hosting as many as 100 staff members in the weekly meditation led by guest teachers such as Deepak Chopra.

Mark Bertolini, CEO of health insurance giant Aetna, sustained serious injury in a near fatal ski accident and was so frustrated by ineffective prescribed painkillers that he turned to mindfulness and yoga to control his pain and manage his emotions. After making a full recovery, Bertolini implemented a mindfulness-based wellness program in the workplace. To date, 13,000 employees have taken part in the Viniyoga Stress Reduction Program and the program participants, respectively.

Ten years ago, Janice Marturano, then Deputy General Counsel, introduced Mindful Leadership to General Mills. The program, which has become part of the fabric of the company culture, combines mediation, yoga, and mindfulness to help foster leadership among employees. Marturano, who has since left to found the Institute of Mindful Leadership, put yoga and meditation rooms in every building on their campus and was quoted in a piece by Ariana Huffington, saying so perfectly, “There is no work-life balance. We have one life. What’s most important is that you be awake for it.”

MINDFULNESS & VETERANS & THE MILITARY
Congressman Ryan co-introduced a bill to implement programs and integrative health care therapies for U.S. Veterans. Through his participation in a mindfulness stress reduction program at the D.C. Veterans Hospital and Project Welcome Home Troops, he has seen participating individuals discontinue use of medications and start sleeping through the night after finally processing the trauma their bodies have held onto as a result of serving multiple tours. According to Ryan, “many veterans expressed that if they had found mindfulness practices sooner, they believe that it could have prevented divorces and healed strained relationships with family.” One participant described by the Congressman had been unable to drive on a highway since his tour but was able to drive himself on the freeway to Capitol Hill after the program.

Dr. Amishi Jha, the Principal Investigator Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of Contemplative Neuroscience, Mindfulness Research & Practice Initiative, at the University of Miami, conducted a study on the use of mindfulness training with military cohorts. Specifically, her research shows the
impact of mindfulness training (MT) on improving attentional performance, reducing mind wandering, and improving resilience, all things that lead to greater capacity to handle situations productively. This success can translate into all areas of life.

**MINDFULNESS & KIDDOS**

"It is important to teach students to regulate their own emotions...they need to learn that skill in order to grow into productive adults. If they can manage their own emotions they can increase focus, concentration, and resiliency." - US Congressman Tim Ryan

A trial published in the journal of *Developmental Psychology* suggests that the effects of mindfulness are just as powerful in kids as in adults, improving anything from social skills to math scores. Children spend a large part of their waking hours in school and experience stress from a number of sources throughout their day. While a little anxiety can be a natural incentive to achieve, stress can have negative effects on mental and emotional health.

Alberto Carvalho, Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) Superintendent

students explaining, “the increasing demands on youth can lead to increased mental health problems and can have tragic consequences.”

Sadly, children across the country experience high rates of trauma from incidents involving violence at home, sexual abuse, or bearing witness to domestic disturbances or gang related brutality in their communities. Trauma can alter the perception of how a child views the world and how they cope and handle stress. When a child’s safety and security are at risk, he or she may regress behaviorally or academically.

Judge Steve Leifman, Associate Administrative Judge of the Miami-Dade County Court Criminal Division and Chair of the Florida Supreme Court’s Task Force on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues in the Court, explains, “Many of our educators are reacting to the negative behaviors these children are exhibiting and not addressing the causes. Too often, in trying to address the behavior, children are pulled out of class and placed in an environment with other students with behavior issues, which re-traumatizes the child and places them at risk for exposure to the criminal system and mental illness.” And as Judge Leifman points out, while medications are frequently used and may reduce symptoms they cannot heal the traumatized brain. And so begins the vicious cycle.

In 2013, Judge Leifman partnered with M-DCPS to introduce Typical or Troubled?, a validated program from the American Psychiatric Association Foundation that trains teachers, counselors, and school personnel to identify symptoms of mental illness and traumatized students so that they can get the appropriate treatment before it is too late. Results have not been tracked yet, but the early phases of the program appear promising.
MINDFULNESS INITIATIVES & SCHOOLS

Stress and anxiety disrupt learning for students. A study featured in a Wall Street Journal report on the effect of stress in students shows that consequences are significant and counterproductive to academic progress. Stress in the classroom environment increases the likeliness of learning problems, causes difficulty regulating emotions and reactions, and can lead to children internalizing problems. Additional research shows a correlation between high anxiety and lower test performance.

"Mindfulness increases attention, impulse regulation, empathy, focus, and awareness. Students need to learn a positive way of approaching their world, their day, each moment, and realize the impact they have on themselves and others," says Carvalho.

Dealing with students’ stress - whether they experience in the classroom or outside of the classroom, and then bring it in - is integral to a productive environment. Congressman Ryan has directed funds in his own district towards mindfulness and believes these programs could transform America’s education system. Decreased out-of-school suspensions, increased focus and self-awareness, and improved ability to regulate emotions are among the various results he has seen in a Warren, Ohio school where mindfulness has been added to the curriculum. A growing number of schools are partnering with organizations to offer programs and curriculum to their students. AltSchool, a community of micro schools with locations in California and New York, and San Francisco’s Visitacion Valley Middle School both offer school based initiatives. The programs, including Quiet Time (QT) stress-reduction program, boast successes such as reduced suspensions, reduced truancy, and increased GPAs.

MindUP, which began in 2003 as part of philanthropist Goldie Hawn’s Hawn Foundation, is an initiative offered to schools globally. Aligned with Common Core Standards, so schools can easily integrate the mindfulness lessons into their curricula, the results are impressive. The MindUP site boasts a 100% satisfaction rate among teachers who have implemented the program; it also cites a study illustrating that 58% of participating students were more inclined to help others, students achieved higher math scores, and 82% reported having a more positive outlook. Another study found that, after a four-month MindUP intervention, students demonstrated improvements in levels empathy, optimism, and executive function reaction time.

In Miami, Superintendent Carvalho is bringing the Mindful Kids Miami (MKM) program to his schools, demonstrating his commitment in creating a safe and healthy school experience for the 350,000 students in his district. Carvalho explains, “The responsibility of the education system has evolved over time. The old paradigm of schools being tasked with teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic is no longer enough. In today’s world, students require more and educators need to be able to adapt and teach respect, restraint, and responsibility.”
Some cities are figuring it out. With the scientific research backing up appropriate interventions, we can find successful model cities such as Miami and DC. The collaboration taking place in these cities, where they have addressed problems through progressive solutions by partnering across institutions, should be replicated nationwide to give our children the help they need to grow up to be productive citizens who contribute to society. Everyone wants to be happy and feel good emotionally; mindfulness is an effective and accessible tool to experience a healthy lifestyle. Unfortunately the stigma attached to mindfulness is the greatest barrier to more people experiencing the psychological well-being that it brings. Many believe that we are in the early stages of removing that stigma.

Dr. Jha is currently working with military leaders to incorporate mindfulness training in their programs — a shift in the right direction. "Science plays a role in the growing acceptance. If people are able to track the benefits and see functional changes then it is actionable," says Dr. Jha.

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Treating Stress and Trauma With Mindfulness

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