

# Supporting Diverse Classrooms: One Mindfulness Lesson At A Time

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# Today's Goals

- \* Define mindfulness
- \* How mindfulness became secularized and integrated into schools
- \* Discussion of specific mindfulness techniques
- \* Overview of pilot site for Mindful Schools curriculum
- \* Data/outcomes from curriculum

# What is Mindfulness?

- \* Mindfulness is...
  - \* A particular way of paying attention to the present moment
  - \* Meeting our present experience with an accepting and nonjudgmental stance
  - \* Purposefully bringing awareness to everything in one's experience; includes all sensations, thoughts, and feelings
- \* This helps us understand how our inner world operates

*“The awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment.” - Jon Kabat-Zinn*

“...mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness. It is cultivated by purposely paying attention to things we ordinarily never give a moment’s thought to. It is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives, based on our inner capacity for relaxation, paying attention, wisdom, and insight.”

– Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*

# What Mindfulness is Not...

- ... about being calm or any particular way but instead finding a place for the full range of experience
- ... to make ourselves feel better, but to get better at feeling
- ... about stress reduction (though it can help to significantly reduce stress)
- ... the absence of thought
- ... about being complacent or passive
- ... religious

# Mindfulness Practice: Where to Begin

## Begin With the Breath:

- \* It is portable, necessary, and silent (you can tap into this anywhere)
- \* Connected to the physical body
- \* Anchoring to the breath when the mind wanders
- \* Creates a foundation of mindfulness to then be able to 'drop in' in small moments throughout the day

# Additional Points to Consider...

- \* You can do ANYTHING mindfully
- \* Mindfulness is not necessarily a “quiet” practice: all activities can be done “one mindfully”, that is, bringing full attention to the here-and-now, whatever that may be
- \* Mindfulness involves observing without judging-- allowing and accepting what is
  - \* *This doesn't mean everything is perfect-- it means we can choose what kind of relationship we want to have with a situation*
- \* Distractions and thoughts are INEVITABLE- it's your **response** to this observation that makes the difference
- \* ***Why practice mindfulness quietly, then?***
  - \* Quiet practice helps cultivate a foundation to generalize mindfulness into daily life

# What Purpose Does Mindfulness Serve?

**Emotion**



**Reaction**

**Emotion**



**Mindfulness**



**Response**

# The Importance of Mindful Attention

## Pitfalls of Emotion

- \* Our emotions can make us feel like we're out of control
- \* We get 'caught up in our emotions'
- \* Roughly *half a million* U.S. teachers leave the profession each year – a turnover rate of over **20 percent** (*Mindfulschools, 2015*)
- \* We react vs. respond—we're less able to make a thoughtful choice about our decisions



## How Mindfulness Can Help

- \* When we strengthen our awareness of the present moment, we are able to:
  - \* Slow down
  - \* Recognize what's going on for us
  - \* Discern whether or not we want to make a specific choice
  - \* Make decisions with intentionality



# Time to practice...

## Observation of Breath



# Mindfulness for the educator

\* Research shows integrating mindfulness into your life results in:

- \* Increased self-care and decreased burnout
- \* Increased compassion for students
- \* Increased ability to connect with students; stronger relationships
- \* Increased awareness of responses to students
- \* Ability to teach students mindfulness skills more effectively

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sChYoFxPznl> – Dr. Richard Davidson

(Flook et. al, 2013; Grossman, Niemann, Schmidt, Walach, 2004)

# History

- \* Mindfulness has been in practice for thousands of years
- \* The concept and practice has become secularized
- \* Began to become integrated into physical health and mental health practices
  - \* Ram Dass (Harvard Psychologist), Jon Kabat-Zinn (UMASS Medical Center) and others brought the practice to the U.S. in the 1970's
  - \* 30 years of research and empirical evidence to support the practice\*
- \* Mindfulness has been shown effective across a wide variety of presenting problems and concerns and is integrated within many disciplines, including healthcare, business, and education

\*(Grossman et. al, 2003; Langer & Moldoveanu)

# Reality is...

- \* Kids are coming to school with more and more difficulty regulating their emotions and sustaining attention...

According to NIMH:

- \* 9% of children 13-18 are diagnosed with ADHD
- \* 14% of children 13-18 are diagnosed with a mood disorder
- \* 25.1% of children 13-18 are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder

According to CDC:

- \* Mental health diagnoses have become a 'public health concern'
- \* In 2007- 11.3% of children aged 2-17 years had been diagnosed with an emotional, behavioral, or developmental condition and nearly 50% of adolescents aged 13-18 years had ever had a mental health disorder.

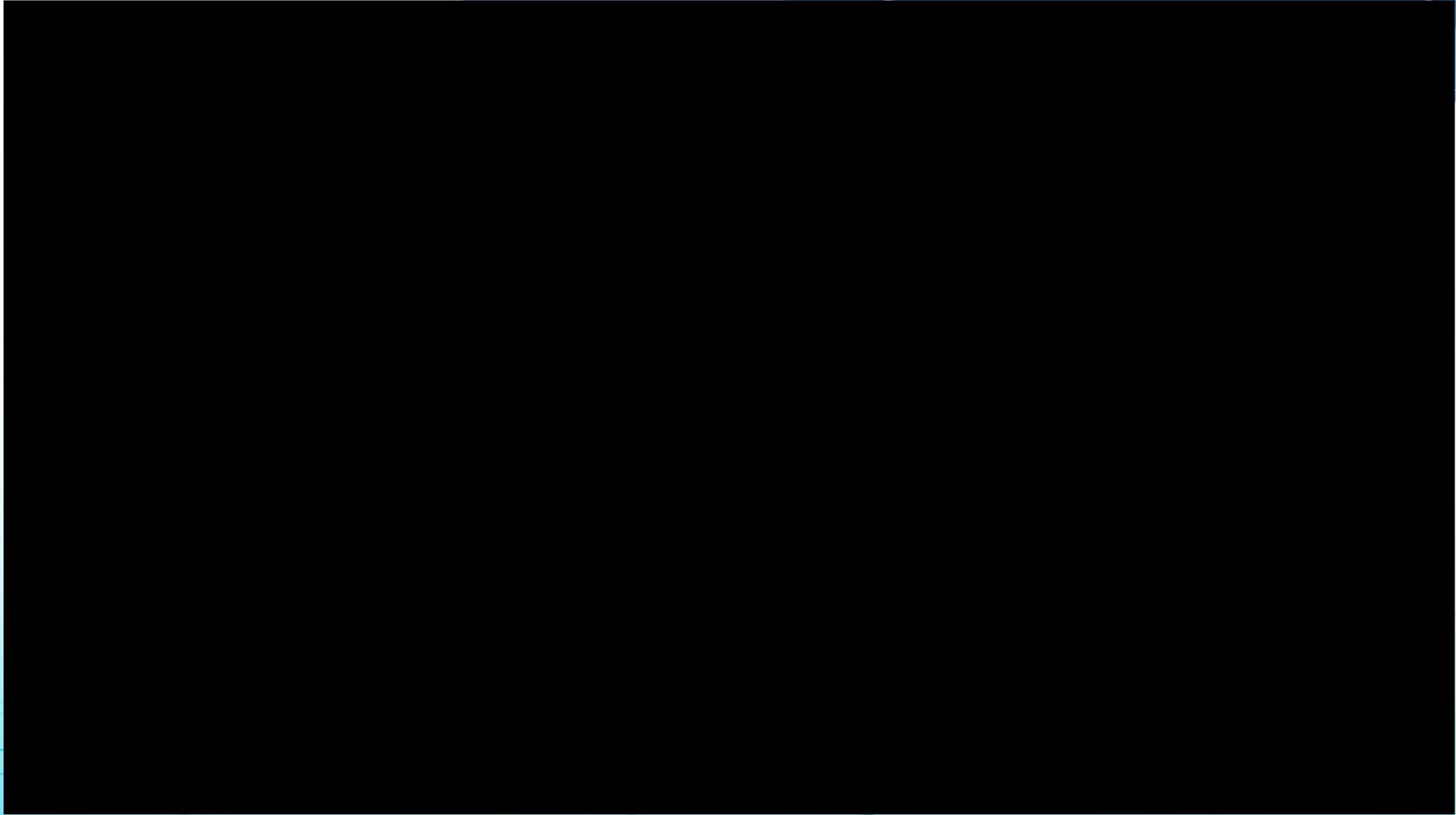
(NIMH, 2015; Perou, et. Al, 2013)

# Why try mindfulness in the classroom?

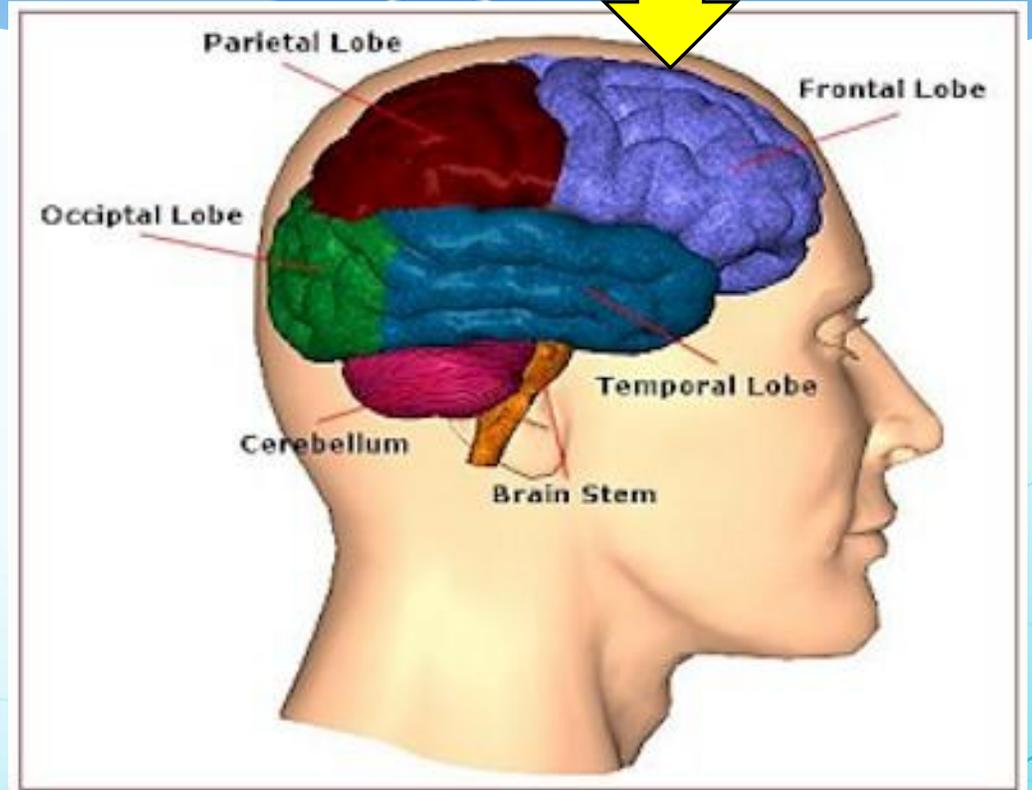
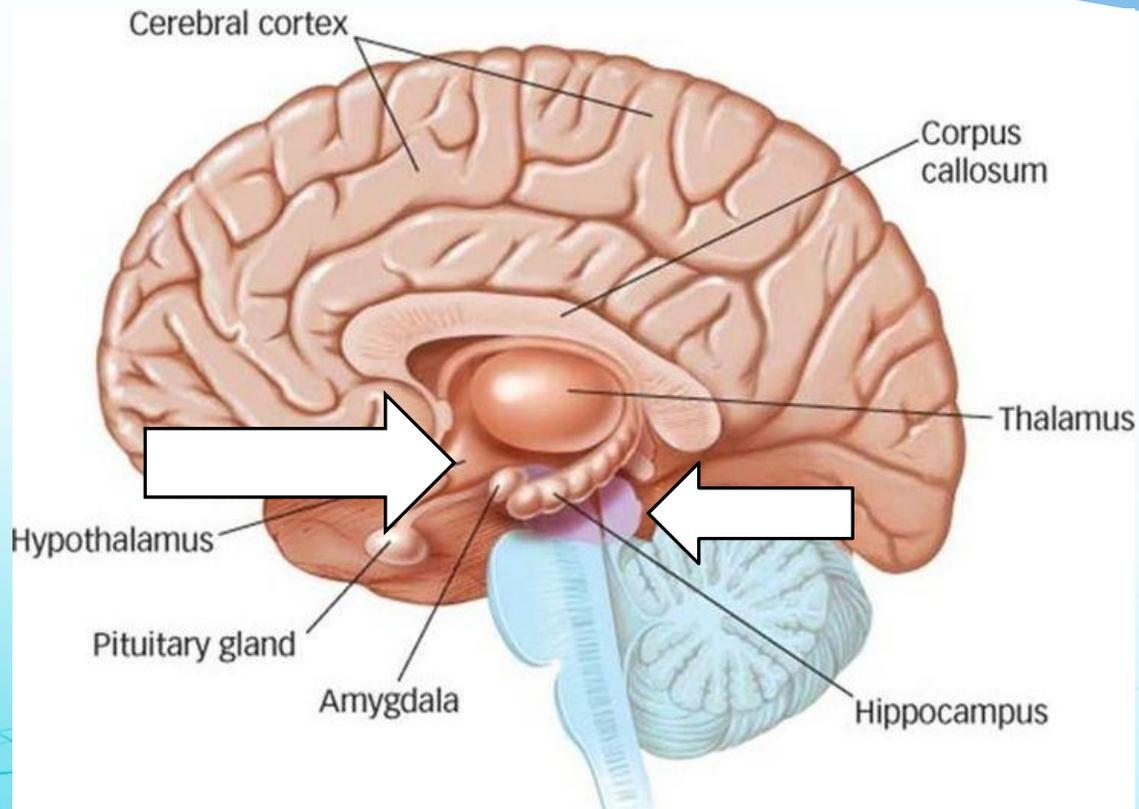
Research shows that the implementation of mindfulness in the classroom is connected to improvements in:

- \* Executive brain function- impulse control, planning, reasoning, problem solving, etc.
- \* Memory
- \* Attention
- \* Emotional resilience
- \* Academic performance
- \* Student behavior
- \* Ability to manage ongoing stress
- \* <https://youtu.be/D83VV18Lc5s>

Calm Classroom, 2014



# Subcortex & Frontal Lobe



# A little bit about the brain...

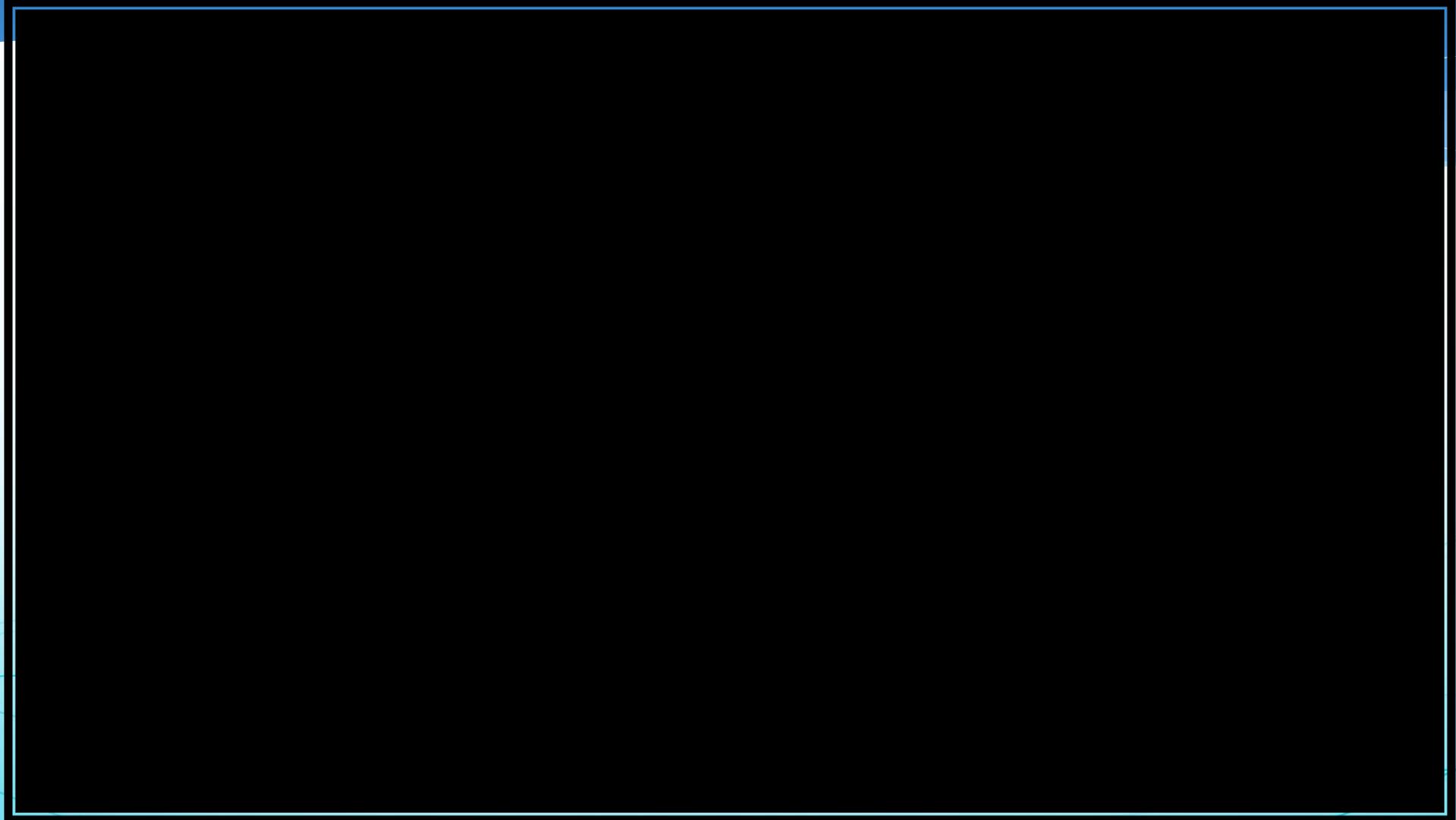
- \* The brain stem is our most primal part of the brain-- it is responsible for the fight, flight, or freeze response.
- \* The frontal lobe is responsible for executive functioning: planning, reasoning, problem solving, impulse control, etc.
- \* When the body perceives threat or fear, the subcortex, limbic system, and brain stem (sympathetic nervous system) go into overdrive and the frontal lobe is DEACTIVATED
  - \* This means we are reacting emotionally and can't make good choices!
- \* **Mindfulness helps us SLOW down and engage prefrontal cortex (parasympathetic nervous system) in order to make better choices.**
- \* Repetition of mindfulness practice actually **changes the brain**

# How are we changing experience?

- \* Begin with focusing on bodily sensations as a base, noticing changes in the sensory field, strengthening this body-brain connection
- \* → Move toward more sustained attention states
- \* → Reduce habits and reactions, increasing responses and choices
- \* → Strengthen the ability to shift from sympathetic nervous system to parasympathetic nervous system
- \* Change from top-down regulation (e.g., using the prefrontal cortex to down-regulate the limbic system through reappraisal) to down-up regulation.
- \* This process strengthens the neuro-circuitry in a different and more helpful way-- neurons that fire together, wire together.

(Farb, Anderson, & Segal, 2012)

# Hand Model of the Brain



# Our Pilot Site

- \* Broken Ground elementary School in Concord, NH
  - \* Serves Grades 3, 4, and 5
  - \* Concord, NH has served as a refugee relocation site for several years: during 2008-2014, 1,339 refugees were relocated to Concord
  - \* Refugees were resettled from the following countries in FY 2014: Serbia, Russia, Burundi, DRC, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Vietnam, Bhutan, Burma-Rohingya, Afghanistan, and Iraq

# Why Mindfulness With a Diverse Student Population?

Mindfulness skills are fully accessible to students regardless of their:

- \* Level of English language proficiency
- \* Level of cognitive ability
- \* Socio-economic status
- \* Age
- \* Severity and range of symptoms

# Demographics

- 40% of students receive free or reduced-cost lunch
- 20% of students receive therapy, either in school or in an outpatient setting
- 15% are English Language Learners
- 30% were identified in universal screening process (SSBD) with internalizing, externalizing, or academic problems

# Mindful Schools

## Participants at Pilot Site

- \* Third Grade Classrooms: 3 out of 6
- \* Fourth Grade Classrooms: 5 out of 6
- \* Fifth Grade Classrooms: 3 out of 5
- \* Total Students Served: 253
- \* Children in these classrooms represent the full continuum of students typically served by this elementary school:
  - \* “typical” students
  - \* refugee students
  - \* attention problems
  - \* emotion regulation/mental health problems (e.g. depression, anxiety, ASD)
  - \* learning and intellectual differences

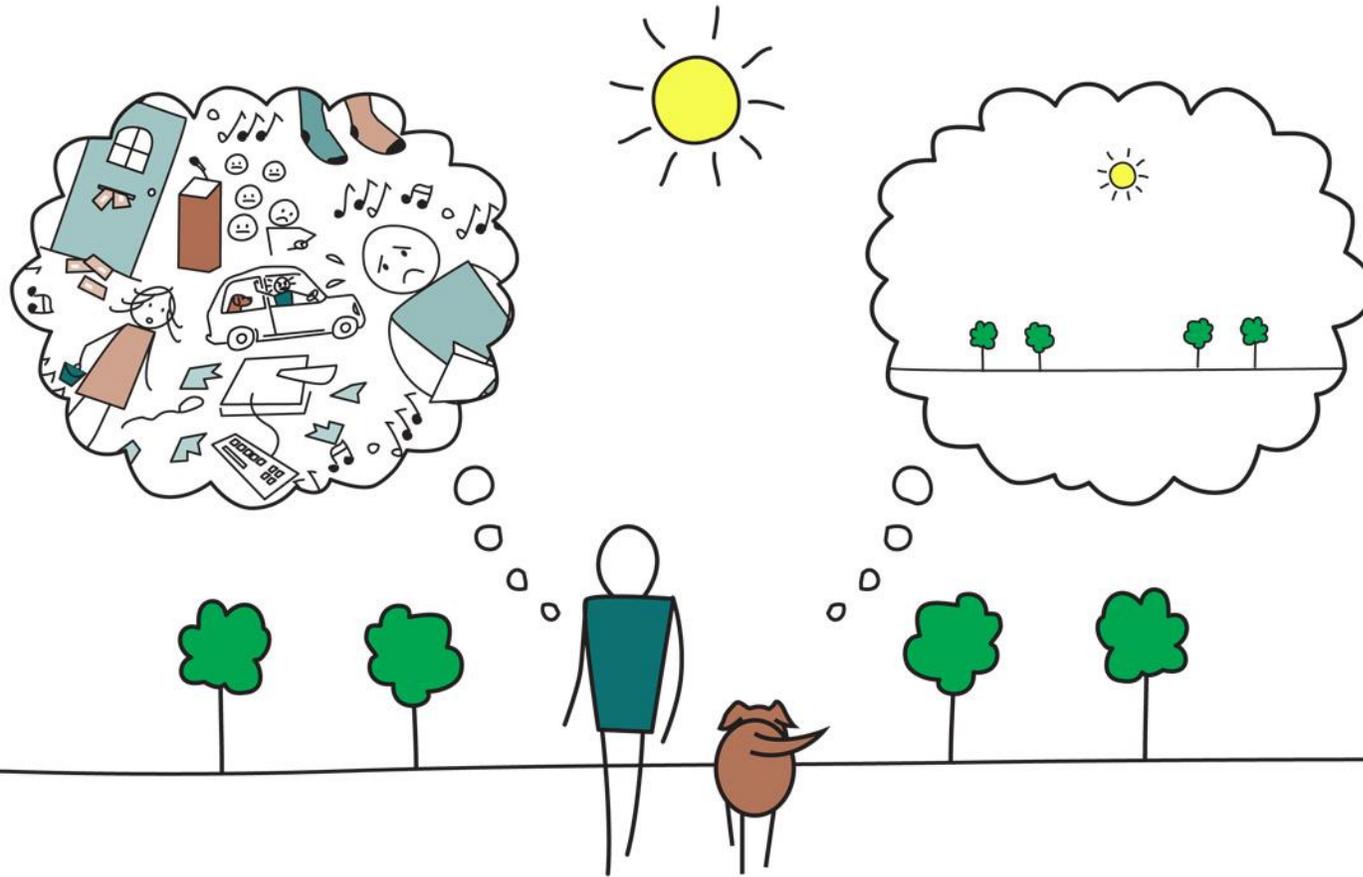
# About Mindful Schools

- Established in Oakland, CA
- Includes sixteen 15-minute mindfulness lessons
- Can be used in conjunction with any kind of SEL Curricula
- Teachers/support staff stay in classroom to learn the material alongside students
- Two foundational lessons are taught in first two sessions and built upon in subsequent sessions
- Once the techniques are taught/internalized, the main instruction is to repeat short moments of practice throughout the day
- There is a worksheet for each lesson to help children internalize & generalize skills

# Outcomes

- \* Of the 11 classrooms, teachers felt mindfulness created an environment where they could get significantly more instructional time PER DAY:
  - 5-10 minutes 64% of respondents
  - 11-20 minutes 18% of respondents
  - 21-30 minutes 18 % of respondents

	<b>Student Relatedness</b>	<b>Attention</b>	<b>Student Ability to Settle Down</b>	<b>Impulse Control</b>	<b>Emotion Regulation</b>
<b>Very Helpful</b>	67%	67%	100%	55%	55%
<b>Somewhat Helpful</b>	33%	33%	N/A	45%	45%



Mind Full, or Mindful?

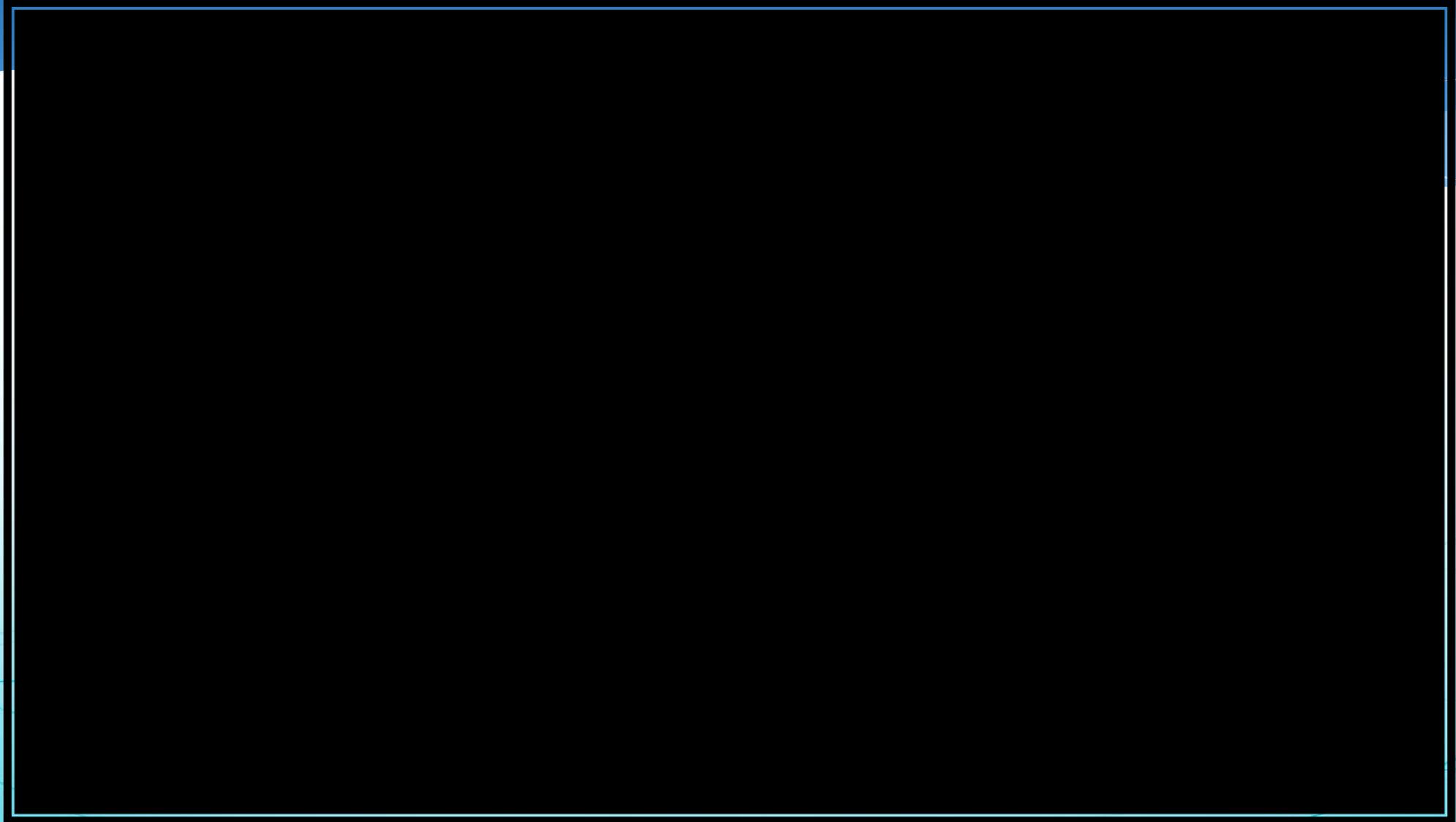
# How To Introduce Mindfulness

- \* Before introducing curriculum to the classroom, meet privately with students who may disrupt the process in order to preview material
- \* Suggestions to introduce:
  - \* “Has anyone ever felt mad, sad, or nervous, and didn’t know how to feel better?”
  - \* “Has anyone ever done something when they were upset, angry, etc., and then later felt badly about it?”
  - \* “Has anyone ever got really distracted in class and by the time you realized it, you had no idea what was going on?”
- \* Create a “container” including agreements and structure for mindfulness time

# A Consideration For Trauma

- \* Trauma affects brain development and alters responses for children and teens
- \* Educators need to be aware that some responses and behaviors may be the result of adverse childhood experiences or chronic stress
- \* When practicing and teaching mindfulness, be **curious** about the child's responses
- \* Be responsive, compassionate, and considerate if you are aware of the child's history
- \* Offer accommodations- eyes open for example

# What Kids Think About Mindfulness



# Mindful Bodies

- \* Many kids have not been taught to pay attention to their bodies, therefore we can't expect them to know HOW to regulate them.
- \* Great foundation for other mindfulness exercises—easy to reference anytime once established
- \* Reinforce practice and talk about experience
- \* “We can wear our mindful bodies and we can take them off. So until next time we practice, we’re going to take our mindful bodies off.”

# Mindful Breathing

- \* Teaches kids not just to breathe, but to pay attention to their breathing, to notice when they are distracted, and refocus on breath
- \* Using the belly as their “anchor”
- \* Easy for kids to use and understand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3hXqh93QRo>

# More Mindfulness Exercises

## Mindful Colors

- \* Choose a color and have kids close their eyes
- \* Individually or in small groups, have them name 5 things in the room that are that color
- \* Have them open their eyes and repeat exercise
- \* Discussion: What was the difference?

## Gratitude

- \* Teaches children to look for the positive and be more mindful of the good in their lives
- \* Places emphasis on gratitude not just for “big” things, but also simpler, everyday things
- \* Makes connection that shifting our attention helps to shift our feelings

# Video Example



# Hand Breathing



# Mindful Walking

- \* What do you notice using your five senses:
  - \* Smell
  - \* Hearing
  - \* Taste
  - \* Touch
  - \* Feel

# Counting to 5 Senses

\* In THIS moment:

\* What do you

\* Smell

\* Hear

\* Taste

\* Touch

\* Feel



# Mindful Eating

- \* Mindful snack
- \* Smaller groups- Mindful Bite
- \* Candy/Raisins, etc.
  - \* Smell
  - \* Hear
  - \* Taste
  - \* Touch
  - \* Feel

# If a Child Refuses...

- \* Self reflection
  - \* How mindful was I? How did I present/explain things?
- \* Request they sit quietly for allotted time and they have the choice to participate or not.
- \* Don't expect perfection
- \* Check in with them one on one afterwards
- \* Check your intentions and judgments

# Even If You Choose Not To Teach Mindfulness...

Being a mindful educator is a very powerful intervention

# Questions and Troubleshooting?



# Resources/Programs

- \* [Mindfulschools.org](http://Mindfulschools.org)
- \* Calm Classroom
- \* Mindup (The Hawk Foundation, 2011)- <http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/>
- \* <http://stopbreathethink.org/>
- \* <http://www.roomtobreathefilm.com/resources/organizations/index.html>
- \* <http://www.mindfuleducation.org/about-ame/>
- \* <http://www.edutopia.org/>
- \* <http://www.teachthought.com/uncategorized/new-priority-teaching-mindfulness-elementary-school/>
- \* <http://www.modmind.org>