



# Shrewsbury Public Schools

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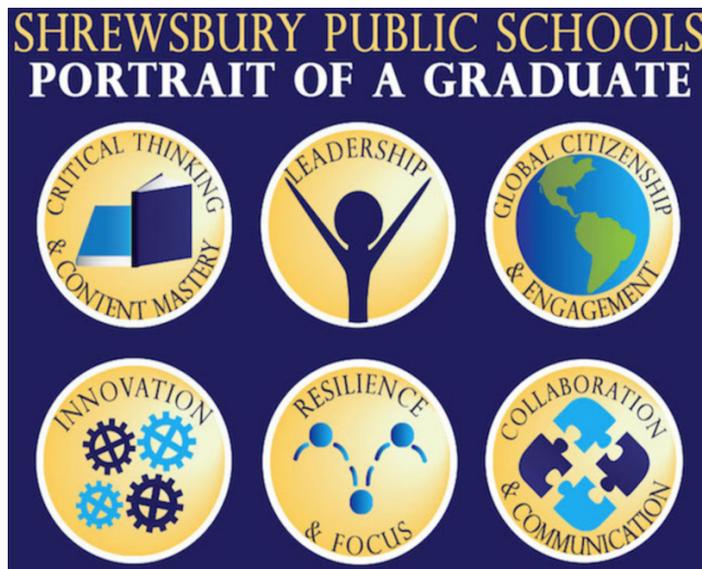
Dear Members of the Shrewsbury School Committee,

This communication serves as an update to you and the community on the partnership between the Shrewsbury Public Schools and WholeSchool Mindfulness (formerly the Mindfulness Director Initiative-MDI), as we near the end of year three of our partnership, despite some interruptions in programming due to the pandemic. Mindfulness programming in our schools is having a positive impact on students and staff, as highlights of this report and the presentation that follows, will demonstrate. SPS and WholeSchool Mindfulness are providing resources and supports to students and adults that many schools do not have. Over the past school year, I have fielded more than a few local and national inquiries regarding the mindfulness opportunities that we are providing in our schools. Our school district prides itself on being innovative and responsive to the needs of students, staff, and families, and the mindfulness director position is one resource that is supporting these critical efforts.

Mr. Jordan Grinstein, SPS's Mindfulness Director, sponsored through WholeSchool Mindfulness, is integrating mindfulness opportunities into everyday experiences both in and out of the classroom. I am happy to report that the demand for this programming is very high at all levels (elementary, middle, and high). The goal is to solidify mindfulness opportunities for all students and staff. The grade 4 mindfulness student ambassador program is proving impactful to our students in the younger grades, as our ambassadors are becoming well equipped in public speaking and transformative leadership. Jordan's work supports SPS's Portrait of a Graduate that specifically identifies the importance of students' *resilience and focus*:

- Persevere to accomplish difficult tasks and to overcome academic and personal barriers to meet goals
- Work effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities
- Employ strategies to maintain personal wellness, focus, and intention in their lives

- Incorporate feedback effectively and deal positively with praise, setbacks, and criticism
- Monitor and direct their own learning, adapting their approach as needed to successfully complete a task or solve a problem



Teaching mindfulness to students in a consistent way, while offering them ongoing opportunities to practice, provides students with a toolkit for life, much in the same way that teaching financial literacy lays a foundation for students to learn about responsible money habits early on. It is about being proactive by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and strategies they need to be healthy, happy, and fulfilled.

Mindfulness is often defined as “increased, purposeful, nonjudgmental attention to the present moment,” and is a skill that allows students to gain a deeper understanding of their mind, including aspects such as attention, thoughts, emotions, and feelings. There is a significant amount of independent research that illustrates the benefits of mindfulness for [people of all ages](#), including [school-aged children](#). [Studies on mindfulness in schools](#) show that mindfulness-based strategies have served as a helpful tool for educators seeking to improve students’ educational experiences and cognitive and social-emotional development, resulting in better academic outcomes. It does not take more than a few moments to find information related to mindfulness opportunities for adults living and working in [healthcare](#), [government](#), and [business](#). Practicing wellbeing in the workplace and in our homes is good for all of us. Mindfulness is one strategy that we can consistently share with all of our students to strengthen their social, emotional, and physical well-being. The American Academy of Pediatrics shares the following:

- “The pandemic has underscored the urgent need to continue to integrate emotional and behavioral health into standard pediatric care. The pandemic also underscores the urgent need for advocacy related to the mental health of children and adolescents, as highlighted in the **AAP-AACAP-CHA Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health**. Pediatricians, professionals, families, and agencies must partner together to support the emotional and behavioral health of our nation’s infants, children, adolescents, and families. Of importance is the appropriate allocation of resources to address the growing behavioral, emotional, and mental health needs of our nation’s children and families.”
- “As much as possible, children and adolescents with behavioral challenges should continue to follow structured routines and reward systems and those with fear, anxiety or depression should be encouraged to practice mindfulness and reframing.”
- “For all ages and stages, facilitating resilience is key and includes promoting adaptation to change, using strategies to buffer the stress that comes with experiencing trauma and recovery in a reasonable time frame. Pediatricians can remind families about the strength they provide for their children by being present, empathic, and nurturing. Practicing techniques together such as mindfulness, relaxation, and focusing on the present moment can help the entire family build coping skills to deal with uncomfortable and frightening feelings. When practiced regularly, children and caregivers can build skills that promote self-regulation and greater awareness of their feelings and the feelings of others that last long beyond the duration of the pandemic. Building networks of social support have also been found to be central to promoting resilience.”

The Surgeon General of the United States recently issued an [advisory](#) regarding the mental health of young people, writing “the challenges today’s generation of young people face are unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate. And the effect these challenges have had on their mental health is devastating.” Similarly, The United States Department of Education’s [Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, Behavioral, and Mental Health Needs](#) provides information on its initiative to support wellness, which further helps to support students’ social, emotional, and academic learning.

The following data illustrates ways in which mindfulness programming has been implemented in the Shrewsbury Public Schools, including the tools, strategies and programming used in individual, small and large group settings. The data suggests that

students and adults feel better after practicing mindfulness. Here is a sample of staff and student data collected in January 2022, from students and staff who chose to complete the (optional) surveys.

### **Quantitative Data Highlights**

- More than 65 staff (mostly teachers) returned surveys...
  - Over 90% of teachers agree that the Mindfulness Director has a positive impact on the school.
  - Over 75% of teachers say that *they* have personally benefited from the director's work with their students.
- Of a group of over 150 students surveyed (mostly 4<sup>th</sup> graders) who had been working with the Mindfulness director...
  - 80% believe it would be helpful for other students.
  - 77% believe mindfulness made them feel more relaxed or calm.
  - Almost half have had a chance to lead mindfulness for others in the school community (through the 4<sup>th</sup> Grade Mindfulness Ambassadors program)
- Student participants submitted surveys after the Mindfulness Director led several sessions with the high school cheerleading team...
  - 100% of participants enjoyed the program.
  - 100% of participants think it would be helpful for other students.

### **Qualitative Data Highlights**

From the staff survey:

- “Mr. Jordan has helped our students find calm and peace when their world has been so unpredictable. Students use the strategies he teaches during times when they feel stressed, anxious, sad, and when they just want to calm and refocus their mind before assessments or longer periods of learning. Students use these strategies with peers as they work through issues that arise at recess, on the bus, and even at home to sleep at night.”
- “My students LOVE being mindfulness leaders and going into other classrooms. It is such a great leadership opportunity and the students really enjoy being the “teacher” and helping others. It has given my students confidence and motivation to help others.”

- “Jordan has come into my small group special education classroom weekly now since November. He is working with a group of students that has a range of disabilities including mental health challenges and a high level of academic need. He has been able to slowly and consistently deliver a high level of mindfulness instruction while also tuning into their specific individual needs. Each week he has the students come up with a new breath technique using their interests and then has them teach the group. He walks them through guided breathing meditations with music, while also validating their various emotions and concerns. He makes the room feel safe and comfortable, and the students look forward to seeing him each week.”
- “Mr. Jordan’s teaching and practicing mindful strategies and movement with our class has helped many students regulate their emotions during stressful times in school and at home. Students have shared using these strategies when interacting with siblings and calming themselves in the night to help get to sleep. Students are seen self-regulating in class during stressful times and sharing strategies with each other when needed. Students also share they enjoy taking mindful moments in school and at home to just feel peaceful and calm.”
- “Jordan has been working with a group of 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys who all were struggling to cope with the daily stress of school. He has formed a strong relationship with them based on trust, empathy, and commitment. He always shows up and he welcomes the students as they are on any given day. The students eagerly await their session and have positive things to say after they meet. I have begun to notice the effect he has on students. When completing a think sheet because of inappropriate behavior, one student said, ‘I will just breathe and not get so mad next time.’ He also said, ‘I will use different language.’ Another student said, ‘I will be responsible and not do that again.’ These may seem like small statements, but the students have not displayed any introspection before this time.”
- “Jordan is incredible and an irreplaceable figure in the Beal community. He’s the Mister Rogers of SPS! Kids look forward to seeing “Mr. Jordan” and learning about mindfulness to take on their day. He has a calming, pleasant demeanor, and especially for our young boys who need strong male figures, is an incredible influence.”

From the student survey:

- “Mindfulness had helped me stay focused in my work and feel relaxed whenever things are kind of complicated.”

- “Mr. Jordan should do this for the next generation.” (4<sup>th</sup> grader)
- “Mindfulness has helped me when feeling strong emotions, which is a big thing for some people.”
- “One time I woke up from a night mare and mindfulness helped me get back to sleep 😴”
- “Mindfulness has helped me stay focused on my work and not get distracted by others.”
- “Mindfulness helps me when something is going on in my family. (I wouldn’t like to share what.)”
- “One time I was doing mindfulness at my house because I got mad, but I took a deep breath, counted to 10, and determined if the problem was big or small, and it helped me.”
- "I was about to get the last ice cream when my cousin took it without even asking, and I was the one who bought it with the 2 dollars I got for my birthday. I was angry so I just sat down and took a couple rainbow breaths and flower breaths."

I am seeking your approval to build the cost of the Mindfulness Director into our annual budget. I strongly believe this position and programming align with our Strategic Priorities and Portrait of a Graduate, as we strive to find creative, effective, and long-lasting ways to support the mental and physical needs of our students, staff and families. Shrewsbury Public Schools has greatly benefited from the generosity of WholeSchool Mindfulness, as WholeSchool has largely subsidized this impactful programming over the past three years, as agreed upon in August 2019. I ask that we include the position and associated costs of a Mindfulness Director into our annual budget for the 2022-23 school year.

The following is a summary of the costs for services over the past three years:

Year 1-\$7,500 was paid for by SPS and WholeSchool provided \$60-65,000 in services

Year 2- Same as above.

Year 3 (21-22)- SPS contributed \$19,000 through the Colonial Fund for \$65,000+ in programming.

I look forward to updating the School Committee and the Shrewsbury community on SPS’s partnership with WholeSchool Mindfulness on Wednesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, along with Mr. Marc Waxman, Co-Founder, WholeSchool Mindfulness, Mr. Jordan

Grinstein, Mindfulness Director, and a small group of SPS students and faculty. I look forward to hearing your perspectives and answering your questions at the meeting.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Jane O. Lizotte, Ed.D.