



Shrewsbury Public Schools

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Community Partnerships & Well-Being

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Dear Members of the Shrewsbury School Committee,

The purpose of this memo is to provide you with an update regarding the partnership between the Mindfulness Director Initiative (MDI) and the Shrewsbury Public Schools, and a request that you approve to continue this partnership during the 2020-21 school year. The information contained herein is intended to give an overview of the 2019-20 school year. I look forward to presenting this and additional information to you and the Shrewsbury community at the upcoming School Committee meeting on Wednesday, May 13th. At that time, I will be joined by Mr. Todd Bazydlo, SHS Principal, and Ms. Maura Egan, Grade 8 ELA teacher at Oak Middle School, both of whom have been extensively involved with this innovative effort.

Background

At the School Committee meetings on 9/4/19 and 12/18/19, you listened to presentations by Mr. Todd Bazydlo, SHS Principal, Mr. Marc Waxman, Co-founder of the Mindfulness Director Initiative (MDI), Mr. James Frank, Mindfulness Director, and me. The reports outlined the programming in which we actively engaged with MDI from September through December, 2019. This important work has continued, despite the recent COVID pandemic that has forced school closure and commenced remote learning. From our last report to you in mid-December through today, interested students, staff, parents and community members have participated in diverse mindfulness opportunities, including weekly mindfulness sessions and book study groups focusing on mindfulness and racial justice.

Action Steps Completed:

Since the update provided to the School Committee in December, our partnership with MDI has productively continued in the following ways:

- Three 8-week *Introduction to Mindfulness* courses for SPS staff were facilitated by MDI's Executive Director, Marc Waxman. 30 staff from across the district participated regularly. Participants learned the basics of mindfulness meditation, with the goal of reducing stress, manage emotions, and gain greater control over thoughts and actions.
- Three 8-week *Introduction to Mindfulness* courses were attended by 25 parents. Ruth Whitall facilitated each of these sessions. Ruth received extensive teacher training at both the Center for Mindfulness (UMass Medical School) and the University of California at San Diego, Mindfulness-Based Training Institute. She has been teaching Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy since 2013. As a licensed clinical social worker, Ruth has worked with adults in mental health for over 30 years. She is the parent of two children who were educated in the Shrewsbury Public Schools.

- Members of the SHS Girls Track Team met weekly over the course of eight weeks with Marc Waxman to integrate mindfulness into their athletic, home, and school routines. The goal of the sessions aimed to support the athletes by practicing self-awareness, with the goal of finding clarity and self-connection.
- Since the changes related to the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual mindfulness supports have been offered, including:
 - An after school 7-week book study group entitled, *Mindfulness and Racial Justice*, was facilitated by Marc Waxman, with the support of Ms. Maura Egan. This course focused on the book The Inner Work of Racial Justice and was an appropriate continuation of the book studies focused on the texts *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo and How to be an Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi. Even though the course has ended, the group participating in this course has decided to continue to meet until the end of the school year to explore mindfulness more deeply.
 - Three 8-week *Introduction to Mindfulness* courses for SPS staff and parents were facilitated Marc. 20 people participated. This course was so popular with participants that it has been extended by another 4 weeks to continue until the end of the school year.
 - A 5-week *Introduction to Mindfulness* course will start on May 13 for 30 participants who have expressed recent interest in mindfulness. Marc will be joined by Jennifer Maddox in offering this class in two sections to allow for strong community building.

Students participated in Mindful Sports Performance Enhancement (MSPE). MSPE is a cutting-edge mental training program designed for athletes. Drawing on research from the sport sciences, psychology, and neurology, it provides specific guidance in building mindfulness skills essential to consistent, optimal performance. In addition to learning the connection between mindfulness and athletics, participants found mindfulness helpful at school and home.

My colleagues and I look forward to sharing an update with you on Wednesday, and seek your approval for continued programming for the 2020-21 school year, as we endeavor to engage in the next phase of planning. Below are testimonials provided by staff and students regarding mindfulness opportunities that took place between early January and mid-March.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Jane O. Lizotte

Testimonials from current *Introduction to Mindfulness* participants:

- “I have truly benefited from your Wednesday night class with fellow adults from the Shrewsbury community. With the school closure, and the challenges of teaching from home, while taking care of my two little children (ages 9 and 2), and doing all the other activities that are part of motherhood, your class has been a welcome opportunity to help me balance my life. In that moment, I feel connected, and my stress is greatly minimized. This hour is something that I appreciate deeply, and it provides me with perspective and tools to help me navigate my life. I am excited to meet tomorrow night!”
- “I joined this class on a whim and I am so glad that I did! Marc is an excellent teacher and I am grateful for the opportunity to develop my mindfulness practice.”

- “This has been an amazing class and It came at the best possible time. It has given me some resources and strategies to cope when things are unsettled now and will be helpful in the future. The participants have been welcoming and I really appreciate the judge-free zone!”
- “Thank you, Marc, for your caring and expertise in this guided meditation class. I am so grateful that it has been made available, free tuition, remotely, and at this historically needy time. The Wednesday night course has been helpful for all that I am doing personally and professionally. I am grateful to Marc and the class!”
- “I feel that the group has become cohesive and that Marc engages the group with mindfulness techniques that help navigate us during this stressful time that we are enduring. I have enjoyed it tremendously and look forward to the meetings.”
- “This is an amazing service you are providing, I hope it continues in some way that works for everyone. Marc is fantastic; he is a very real, genuine, intelligent, thoughtful individual. It's like he is made to teach this stuff, I hope it continues. Thank you.”
- “This has been a wonderful beginning to my personal practice and am open to participating in mindfulness again in the fall. Thank you!”

Student testimonials from members of the SHS Girls Track Team re: *Mindful Sports Performance Enhancement* (MSPE) sessions:

- "For me, mindfulness has really let me see a change in my racing. I get more aware about my body. For example, when racing the mile I started to anchor my mind towards my shoulders, and once I began to start mindfully running I started to relax my mind and shoulders and pick up the pace even more."
- "Mindfulness for me has definitely been a wonderful experience that has taught me so much about how to really feel and experience life as it happens. It taught me how to not live a life of repeated habit and autopilot."
- "Mindfulness has taught me ways to destress before my races. My performance has been better sometimes. It has taught me to live more in the moment. Taught me to listen to people more."
- "Learned to take time to think about things as I'm doing them and not to rush through my actions. Taking time to be in the moment helped me to relax and perform better in track. I practice the deep breathing when I'm anxious. "
- "Very rewarding! I use it not only in track but also for school - I did it before all my midterms. Has helped me stop worrying about things I don't have control over."