

## **Peace of Mind Community of Practice**

**September 25, 2019**

**Hosted by Principal Liz Whisnant and Colleagues at Mann Elementary School,  
Washington DC**

This was Peace of Mind's 6th Community of Practice gathering of educators currently using the Peace of Mind Curriculum with their students. Bode Aking and Krystal Butler, DCPS SEL Specialists joined us along with Jelena Popovich of the Peace Alliance. Students from American University joined us to take photographs and conduct interviews with willing educators. Our conversation was facilitated by Principal Liz Whisnant and the PoM team: Cheryl Dodwell and Linda Ryden.

### **Reports and Insights from Early Childhood Educators**

- Peace of Mind skills have been particularly helpful during classroom transitions.
- Flower breathing has been particularly helpful, especially when teachers use the visual along with the practice.
- In response to a question about additional mindfulness tools to use during transitions, one educator suggested the use of a bell, pointing out that the sound of a bell has an authority to command young children's attention that doesn't require a human voice.
- A team of PreK teachers said that they have begun a weekly gratitude practice with their students and that this has contributed to a positive climate in their classroom.

### **Reports and Insights from 1st and 4th grade Educators**

- Having a weekly time set aside for Peace of Mind class has been very helpful.
- One fourth grade teacher has found that teaching PoM mid-week is the most helpful, after snack. She was celebrating teaching five weekly lessons - it's great to mark these milestones!
- One first grade teacher was finding it helpful to teach a PoM lesson and then immediately give kids some carpet time together, offering a chance to implement what they have just learned.
- One first grade teacher is integrating PoM with Second Step. She is starting the year with mindfulness practices from PoM, following the mindful moment with Second Step lessons about being a learner. Once this foundation is established, she will turn back to the Peace of Mind lessons and teach them all the way through.
- First grade teachers are noticing their students implementing the conflict resolution skills they learned in Kindergarten.

### **Engaging Students in Mindfulness Practice**

- Teachers agree that having a student co-lead the mindfulness practice at the beginning of class helps all students make the practices their own.
- Linda emphasized that offering students choice is important. Allowing students to choose whether or not to participate is a good approach. We are helping them to

develop their own personal practices, for themselves. If they choose not to participate, that's fine, but they cannot prevent another child from participating. They can't choose for someone else.

- We find that allowing choice actually encourages kids who may be skeptical to try the practices and come to them in their own time.
- Offering choice is a trauma sensitive practice as well. Our goal is for students to try many practices and identify the ones that help them the most. Mindful Breathing may not feel comfortable for all students, so we include practices such as SEE Hear Feel and Mindful Listening.
- Pointing out the many sports figures who use mindfulness to help them improve their athletic performance can also help encourage kids to try mindfulness.

### **What expectations are reasonable for PoM class?**

- Linda points out that some movement is ok. Not all kids practice in the same way; not all kids can sit still for a full practice.
- As long as kids are not interfering with practice by others, you can be flexible about how and where kids practice.

### **DCPS SEL Specialist Perspective**

- Bode Aking, SEL Specialist with DCPS, talked about DCPS moving away from CASEL and toward a new 7 year partnership with Turnaround for Children. He encouraged participants to check out the many educator resources on [their website](#).
- We hope to find ways for PoM to join forces with Turnaround to help support DCPS students.
- SEL Specialist Krystal Butler supports 25 elementary schools in Clusters 1 and 4. She reports that they are all adopting SEL in some way.

### **Perspective from Jelena Popovich, Peace Alliance**

- Jelena has been on capitol hill lobbying legislators to increase funding for SEL and teaching peace in our public schools. She has used Peace of Mind as an example of a strong program that serves the needs of students and teachers.

### **Questions:**

How are DCPS teachers supported in teaching SEL to their students? Where is there Adult SEL training available? All agree it is needed, but not yet provided widely. PoM offers online courses, community of practice gatherings, and an annual conference. Mindful Schools offers online mindfulness courses for educators.

**News from PoM:**

Our new Curriculum for Grades 4 and 5 is now available. Lessons include more applied mindfulness, helping kids begin to investigate bias, stereotypes, standing up to bullying.

Our newest book, Tyaja Uses the THINK Test is now out! Look for news about a book launch in November.

PoM will be presenting a workshop at the Collaborative for Spirituality Conference in NYC in November.