



## Building Caring Communities to Support Youth Mental Health

### Summary

School communities are experiencing alarming rates of depression, anxiety, loneliness, and suicide among youth, especially in those who are from Black, brown and low-income families. Mindful Schools (MS) is a national nonprofit provider with a strong record of supporting local schools to create caring and connected communities in which students can thrive. Our team is currently seeking investment to provide services to Downtown High School (DHS) in San Francisco to address the urgent mental health crisis that staff and students are experiencing and to build a sustainable, schoolwide culture of well-being and equity to support future generations of students and teachers.

### The Mindful Schools Partnership: A Solution to the Youth Mental Health Crisis

Designed by educators for educators, our programs introduce schools to simple-yet-powerful practices that foster awareness, connection, and healing interactions that empower educators and students to connect with their unique strengths and realize their potential. Our inside-out model and “adults-first” approach works closely with school leaders to integrate preventative mental health practices into school routines and supports educators to create inclusive, trauma-sensitive, and culturally affirming learning environments for students.

We provide a customized implementation plan and services based on the unique needs of the school—whether it is teacher burnout, bullying, escalating conflicts, or poor mental health—and we collaborate with staff to determine how mindfulness can be integrated into their values, priorities, and vision for school wellness. Through our program, educators are empowered to build communities of care in which a young person can connect with and gain strength from their teachers, learn practices to support their own well-being and self-agency, and develop skills to build healthy relationships with their peers.

Mindful Schools' approach is guided by multiple research studies that demonstrate a sense of [school connectedness](#) is a key factor to addressing teen mental health; a teacher's [ability to connect](#) socially and emotionally with students is the biggest determining factor in a child's future education and health outcomes; [Whole-School Tier I](#) approaches for addressing trauma tend to be more effective than strategies that focus on providing secondary interventions to individual students; and [investments in adult SEL and staff mental health](#) improve outcomes for both students and staff members.

### Why Downtown High School and Mindful Schools, Why Now?

The DHS community is experiencing increased rates of trauma and toxic stress. The school leadership is looking to partner with a provider that will be able to make a meaningful impact within their unique context. Mindful Schools is a trusted partner and resource for local, underserved schools since our beginnings in Oakland, California, in 2007. MS has a cohort of schools for which we have provided ongoing services, training, and support, including Civic Center Secondary School, Bayside Martin Luther King, Jr. Academy, Hillcrest Elementary, and Daniel Webster Elementary. Most recently, a \$750K grant from the Cigna Foundation in 2021 allowed us to refine our schoolwide services for under-resourced schools. Today, we are focused on providing services for a growing network of local schools who have great need but lack resources for our programming.



Downtown High School serves students who were not able to find success in traditional high schools. Seventy-two percent of students are from low-income families; 50% identify as Latinx and 27% as Black. Their student population is currently experiencing extreme rates of trauma, anxiety, and stress and is in critical need of support.

A core leadership team of DHS teachers has experienced MS' programs and is confident that a partnership will positively impact the lives of their 200 community members. Their team envisions integrating mindfulness into their Project Based Learning curriculum, staff well-being practices, social-emotional learning and restorative practice initiatives. Fourteen DHS staff, including the school security guard, therapist, social worker, principal, math teacher, and librarian have pre-registered to participate in MS training.

In a recent exchange, the DHS Principal mentioned that the incoming high school students now face greater needs in terms of emotional resilience, motivation to engage, and developing relational skills. They are seeing increases in student conflicts, self-harm, and drug use. At the same time, their educators are overburdened after carrying the stress of their students through the pandemic. They see a deep desire for emotional connection after so much time apart. The school leadership's hope is that a co-created mindfulness program will help bring their community together so they can heal, celebrate their shared humanity, and develop the skills and resiliency to flourish in school and in life.

The MS team that will support DHS has collective experience as SFUSD social workers, administrators, and teachers; and wellness team experience, including facilitation of PBL, SEL, restorative practices, and equity-focused professional development, which will ensure support is differentiated and relevant to each key role.

### **Program Outcomes**

Outcomes from Mindful Schools' programs demonstrate our ability to positively impact school environments. In an October 2021 survey, educators reported the following:

- 98% now have effective strategies to build and strengthen relationships with students
- 99% now have effective strategies to build a positive classroom climate
- 96% now have developed strategies to support their own well-being
- 84% now have effective strategies to support students who have experienced trauma
- 60% have noticed improved emotional regulation in students after eight weeks of programming

### **Our Ask**

Thank you for your consideration in supporting the well-being of our most at-risk educators and students at Downtown High School. Your investment in this community has the power to save lives. Please contact [seewan@mindfulschools.org](mailto:seewan@mindfulschools.org) for more information or to discuss this opportunity further.