
A REPORT TO YOUNGSTOWN CITY SCHOOLS CEO KRISH MOHIP

TO: KRISH MOHIP, CEO OF YOUNGSTOWN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
FROM: KATIE STEARS
SUBJECT: CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE AT EAST HIGH SCHOOL IN YOUNGSTOWN
DATE: NOVEMBER 7, 2016
CC: DIANA AWAD SCROCCO

ABSTRACT

This report defines school violence as violence that occurs on school property, during school-sponsored events, or on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events. School violence can be caused by exposure to violence within a student's community or simply by the climate of the school itself, and disproportionately affects economically disadvantaged students as well as students of color. School violence can have a demonstrably negative effect on students, ranging from increased disciplinary actions to lowered grade point averages and increased absences. Faculty and the community are also impacted. Instances of school violence within East High School have become a locally prominent point of contention, but little has been done to rectify the situation. There are possible solutions, however, which are discussed briefly in this report. The primary roadblock to these solutions was found to be lack of commitment from the school's administration, but initiatives taken by the school in the 2016-2017 academic year suggest the administration is finally prepared to make necessary changes to combat school violence.

WHAT IS SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND WHAT CAUSES IT?

In this report, violence is defined as any intentional use of force against an individual or group. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define school violence as "violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored event" (CDC, 2016). School violence can take on many forms, including both physical and verbal abuse, fighting, bullying, cyberbullying, pushing and shoving, assault, and even the use of weapons. Nearly seven percent of high school students were reportedly threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in 2013 (CDC, 2016). Students most at-risk for engaging in school violence often have a prior history of violence, abuse drugs or alcohol, experience trouble at home, or live in poverty (CDC, 2016).

There are multiple causes of school violence. One cause is exposure to violence within the student's community. Bowen and Bowen found that exposure to community violence can severely impact students' attendance, behavior, and ultimately their grades. According to Bowen and Bowen, "Males, African Americans, high school students, school lunch recipients, and urban students tended to report higher exposure to environmental danger" (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). Elementary and middle school students who have witnessed community violence display long-lasting levels of lower academic achievement and tend to score lower on IQ and reading tests (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011). With an enrollment population of 65% African American students and an astounding 98.2% of students considered economically

disadvantaged (see Appendix), Youngstown City School Districts are prime targets for community violence and its unfortunate runoff into school environments (Ohio Department of Education & Center for Accountability and Continuous Improvement, 2015).

A school's climate can also affect the level of violence present. "School climate theory adds significantly to our understanding of school violence, and the identification of contributing or inhibiting factors at the school level can help guide appropriate, effective prevention and intervention efforts" (Welsh, 2000). Tension within a school feeds into itself, just as positive energy within a school will do the same.

WHY IS SCHOOL VIOLENCE A CONCERN?

School violence can have a devastating effect on student attendance, behavior, and grades. The impending fear of potential violence during the school day can make it harder for students to concentrate on their work or focus on learning. This fear can also impact school attendance; students have no motivation to go to school if there is a chance of falling victim to violence there. To quote UNITY, a Prevention Institute initiative funded in part by the CDC to combat violence in schools, "As we know that hungry and malnourished children do not learn well, such is also the case with children who fear, experience or witness violence in their homes, the community, and/or their schools" (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011).

In addition to students, school violence also affects teachers and faculty. Already overburdened by increasing demands and smaller paychecks, the threat of violence compounds the stress on faculty. With their own safety potentially at risk, teachers are driven to desperation to control unruly students but lack the resources or training to do so with any reasonable success. This can result in a high turnover rate for faculty, or difficulty recruiting teachers who would not feel safe in such a work environment (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011).

Finally, on an even grander scale, school violence negatively impacts the local community. School violence decreases the ability for members of the community to confidently engage in school events (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011). It also affects potential investment opportunities; to be forthright, nobody wants to sink money into a school that's not effectively educating its students. A sense of mistrust in public education is fostered when students are not learning what they need to know to be successful adults.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Multiple sources were consulted for the writing of this report. The CDC was referenced to establish a definition of school violence as well as some of its causes. Welsh's article "The Effects of School Climate on School Disorder" was referenced to explain how violence in schools can be caused by the climate within the school itself.

The Ohio Department of Education's Mid-Year Review reports were used for demographic information of students within Youngstown City School District.

Bowen and Bowen's article "Effects of Crime and Violence in Neighborhoods and Schools on the School Behavior and Performance of Adolescents" discusses the effects of school violence on student performance.

The Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth, or UNITY through Violence Prevention published a fact sheet linking violence and learning, and is also cited multiple times throughout this report. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network also discusses the effects of traumatic experiences in school on adolescent students.

Congressman Tim Ryan is a known proponent of mindfulness in schools and once brought funding to Warren and Youngstown schools to start mindfulness programs in 11 schools across both districts. Pat Lowry, Ryan's communications director, responded to questions about the mindfulness program and how it affected violence in the schools it was brought to in a personal telephone interview.

As East High School officials were unable to be reached during the writing of this report, local news articles from WKBN and the Vindicator are cited to discuss the traumatic fight in March that engaged over 50 students and resulted in a multiple-day shutdown of the school. The articles also discuss other fighting-related problems the school has experienced in the 2016-2017 academic year and previous years.

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AT EAST HIGH SCHOOL (RESULTS)

On Tuesday March 8, 2016, a fight broke out in the East High School cafeteria that involved over fifty students. Every Youngstown police officer on duty that day was sent to the school to deescalate the situation (Ricciutti, Smith, & Santelli, 2016). The fight was eventually dispersed, but several students were pepper sprayed during, and several more were handcuffed and removed from the school (Smith, 2016a). Two students ultimately faced charges for their actions during what WKBN described as a "riot" (Ricciutti, Smith, & Santelli, 2016). The school remained closed for the rest of the day and the following day as recommended by the Youngstown Police Department. In the 2016-2017 academic year, more than a dozen fights broke out during the first three weeks alone (Smith, 2016b).

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, high school students often have visceral responses to traumatic events such as East High's March fight. This kind of violence can completely shift the way adolescents view the world, and this has direct consequences for their academic achievement. "Students traumatized by exposure to violence have been shown to have lower grade point averages, more negative remarks in their cumulative records, and more reported absences from school than other students. They may have increased difficulties concentrating and learning at school and may engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2010).

It proved nearly impossible to get in touch with any school officials at East High School while writing this report. Multiple phone calls and emails sent to the Youngstown City Schools CEO Krish Mohip, Public Relations Director Yvonne Mathis, and several other East High School officials returned nothing. As such, information on violence specifically in East High School is lacking in this report, as there appeared to be no other documentation about it accessible to the public outside of articles in the local media about the more newsworthy instances of such violence.

Congressman Tim Ryan's Communications Director Pat Lowry explained that Ryan's initiative to bring mindfulness to schools was meant to aid in reducing the amount of disciplinary actions taken against students, particularly regarding school violence. Schools in the cities of Warren and Youngstown both received the same training, but the program in Warren was much more successful and continues to this day in most of the schools chosen, while only one of the schools in Youngstown has continued with the program. Lowry suggested that a possible explanation was simply the lack of enthusiasm for the program in the Youngstown City School District, particularly among the administration (Lowry, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Whether or not there is a recurring pattern of violence in school is difficult to prove with a few news articles, but the March riot and so many fights in the beginning of the school year alone should suggest precedence that East High School has a violence problem that must be addressed immediately. It is easy to point fingers, but ultimately it is up to everyone involved with East High—students, parents, faculty, and administration—to approach the problem together as a means to solve it.

There are several options available to combat school violence, some of which East High has begun trying. The zero-tolerance suspension policy for fighting has been done away with after proving ineffective (Smith, 2016b). Parents are now also required to come talk to the school about any fights their children engage in while they're in school.

One possible way to combat school violence at East High would be to implement a mindfulness program there. The program would teach both students and faculty deep breathing exercises to help them remain calm in stressful situations, which could lower the tension among members of the school environment. Such programs have been successful in other areas, even as close as Warren, and resulted in fewer violence-based out of school suspensions (Lowry, 2016). While it did not work as well in Youngstown during its initial run, the only reason attributed to its lack of success was a lack of commitment from administration.

CONCLUSION

School violence is a multi-faceted, complex, and universal problem that can have disturbing consequences for the mental health and safety of students and faculty alike. Repeated instances of school violence can result in lowered grade point averages, decreased

school attendance, and difficulty with focus and concentration in school. Violence in school is often a reflection of violence within the community, as exposure to violence outside of school can lead to replication of violent behaviors within. Economically disadvantaged and minority students, particularly African Americans, are especially at risk for becoming victims of school violence or worse, perpetrators.

This is not a distant problem. Violence in schools is happening right here in the Mahoning Valley, and East High School is exemplary of this. With one fight being so large and out of control it was referred to as a riot in local media, there is no better proof that school violence is a problem we face in our own community. Approaches have been taken to combat violence, but not enough is currently being done. However, the initiatives being taken suggest that the school administration is prepared to face the problem head-on and do whatever it takes to reduce, if not eliminate, violence at East High School.

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APPENDIX

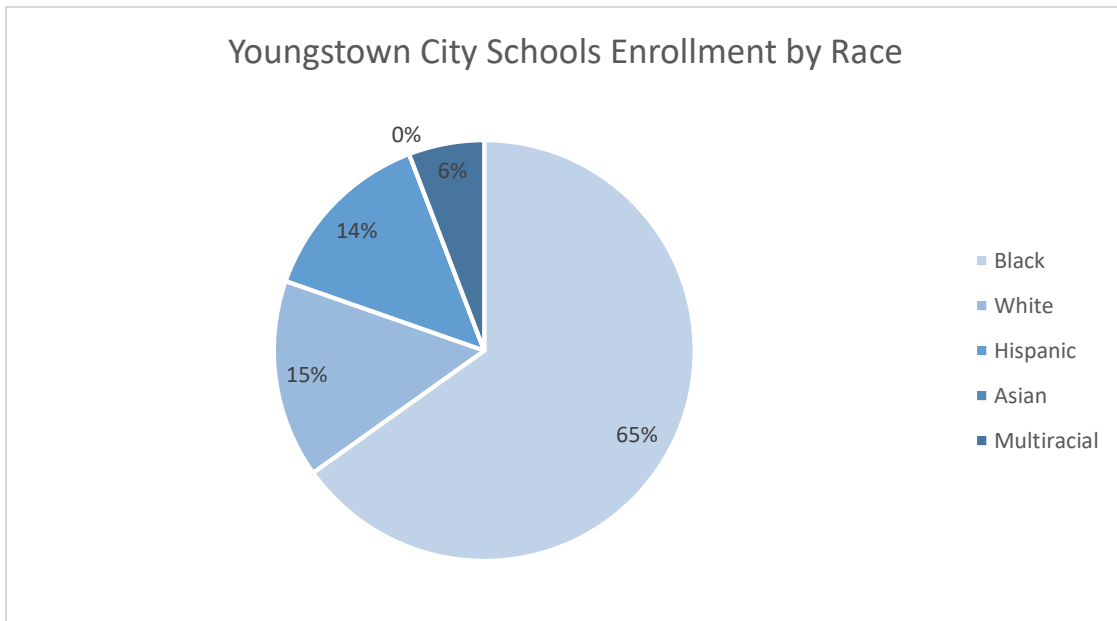


Figure 1 (Ohio Department of Education & Center for Accountability and Continuous Improvement, 2015)

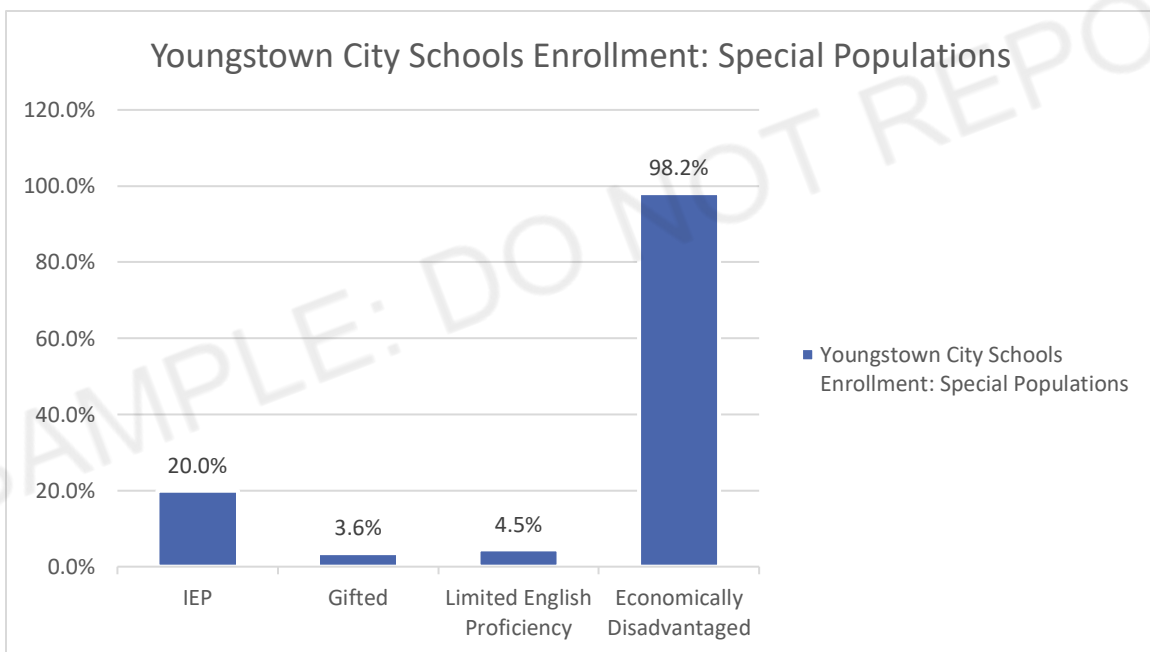


Figure 2 (Ohio Department of Education & Center for Accountability and Continuous Improvement, 2015)

PROPOSAL TO IMPLEMENT A MINDFULNESS PROGRAM AT EAST HIGH SCHOOL TO COMBAT SCHOOL VIOLENCE

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FROM: KATIE STEARS
SUBJECT: CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE AT EAST HIGH SCHOOL IN YOUNGSTOWN
DATE: NOVEMBER 29, 2016
CC: DIANA AWAD SCROCCO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The violence at East High School in Youngstown, Ohio has been a cause of concern for students, staff, and administrators alike for years. The problem received even more local attention after a 50-student fight broke out in March of 2016 that resulted in several arrests and the closing of the school for the day. Such violence has detrimental effects on the students, staff, and community, but little has been done to combat it. A mindfulness program may combat the problem by teaching students and staff to calm and center themselves during periods of high stress. Mindfulness has benefits for both physical and mental wellbeing, and mindfulness programs for students are being implemented in schools all over the country, including within the Mahoning Valley. Such a program would cost virtually nothing, and research suggests that the school could see a reduction of disciplinary actions against students, particularly for violence-related incidents, improved grades, and an increase in attendance and graduation. This proposal suggests a combination of Dave Potter's eight-week mindfulness program and the adaptation of the Holistic Life Foundation's Mindful Moment Room, a space for students to process their feelings and calm themselves during times of emotional distress using mindfulness techniques such as deep breathing and meditation.

PROBLEM ANALYSIS

On Tuesday March 8, 2016, a fight broke out in the East High School cafeteria that involved over fifty students. Every Youngstown police officer on duty that day was sent to the school to deescalate the situation (Ricciutti, Smith, & Santelli, 2016). The fight was eventually dispersed, but several students were pepper sprayed during, and several more were handcuffed and removed from the school (Smith, 2016a). Two students ultimately faced charges for their actions during what WKBN described as a "riot" (Ricciutti, Smith, & Santelli, 2016). The school remained closed for the rest of the day and the following day as recommended by the Youngstown Police Department. In the 2016-2017 academic year, more than a dozen fights broke out during the first three weeks alone (Smith, 2016b).

In this proposal, violence is defined as any intentional use of force against an individual or group. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define school violence as "violence that occurs on school property, on the way to or from school or school-sponsored events, or during a school-sponsored event" (CDC, 2016). School violence can take on many forms, including both physical and verbal abuse, fighting, bullying, cyberbullying, pushing and shoving, assault, and even the use of weapons. Nearly seven percent of high school students were

reportedly threatened or injured with a weapon on school property in 2013 (CDC, 2016). Students most at-risk for engaging in school violence often have a prior history of violence, abuse drugs or alcohol, experience trouble at home, or live in poverty (CDC, 2016).

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

There are multiple causes of school violence. One cause is exposure to violence within the student's community. Bowen and Bowen found that exposure to community violence can severely impact students' attendance, behavior, and ultimately their grades. According to Bowen and Bowen, "Males, African Americans, high school students, school lunch recipients, and urban students tended to report higher exposure to environmental danger" (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). With an alarming enrollment population of 98.2% students considered economically disadvantaged, Youngstown City School Districts are prime targets for community violence and its unfortunate runoff into school environments (Ohio Department of Education & Center for Accountability and Continuous Improvement, 2015).

School violence can have a devastating effect on student attendance, behavior, and grades. The impending fear of potential violence during the school day can make it harder for students to concentrate on their work or focus on learning. This fear can also impact school attendance; students have no motivation to go to school if there is a chance of falling victim to violence there. To quote UNITY, a Prevention Institute initiative funded in part by the CDC to combat violence in schools, "As we know that hungry and malnourished children do not learn well, such is also the case with children who fear, experience or witness violence in their homes, the community, and/or their schools" (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011).

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, high school students often have visceral responses to traumatic events such as East High's March fight. This kind of violence can completely shift the way adolescents view the world, and this has direct consequences for their academic achievement. "Students traumatized by exposure to violence have been shown to have lower grade point averages, more negative remarks in their cumulative records, and more reported absences from school than other students. They may have increased difficulties concentrating and learning at school and may engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior" (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2010). Low grades and attendance should be a priority for any school system, but these things and an increase in aggressive behavior can have dangerous consequences for when these adolescents enter the adult world. Exposure to violence with no way to healthily process it could make the stresses of jobs, bills, and relationships unbearable for future adults.

In addition to students, school violence also affects teachers and faculty. Already overburdened by increasing demands and smaller paychecks, the threat of violence compounds the stress on faculty. With their own safety potentially at risk, teachers are driven to desperation to control unruly students but lack the resources or training to do so with any reasonable success. This can result in a high turnover rate for faculty, or difficulty recruiting teachers who would not feel safe in such a work environment (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011).

Finally, on an even grander scale, school violence negatively impacts the local community. School violence decreases the ability for members of the community to confidently engage in school events (UNITY through Violence Prevention, 2011). It also affects potential investment opportunities; to be forthright, nobody wants to sink money into a school that's not effectively educating its students. A sense of mistrust in public education is fostered when students are not learning what they need to know to be successful adults.

Whether or not there is a recurring pattern of violence in East High School is difficult to prove with a few news articles, but the March riot and so many fights in the beginning of the school year alone should suggest precedence that East High School has a violence problem that must be addressed immediately. It is easy to point fingers, but ultimately it is up to everyone involved with East High—students, parents, faculty, and administration—to approach the problem together as a means to solve it.

DEFINING MINDFULNESS AND DISCUSSING ITS BENEFITS

Mindfulness, in the most general sense, is the state of being aware in the present moment and examining the present moment with a non-judgmental attitude. The term is often used interchangeably with meditation, though meditation is more accurately considered the process in which mindfulness is attained, usually done with deep breathing or yoga. While meditation and mindfulness are core concepts in eastern religions such as Buddhism, it is a secular practice. Meditation can be done in silence, to music or repetitive sounds, or through guided meditations that are easily found on the internet or downloadable smartphone apps, such as *Stop, Breathe, and Think*. While some resources are better than others, there is a wealth of information available, and much of it is free to access.

There is promising research that suggests teaching mindfulness in schools reduces stress of students and faculty and, in turn, lowers the rate of school violence. The benefits of mindfulness in adults has been studied again and again as it has become more popular in the western world, but mindfulness in adolescents has also become a budding area of research in recent years. Research shows that mindfulness practices improve quality of life and reduce psychological distress in adolescents, suggesting that mindfulness provides adolescents with the tools to cope with difficult circumstances in their lives (Pepping, Duvenage, Cronin, & Lyons, 2016).

Adolescence is a period well known for the psychological and emotional challenges it brings. According to Bluth, Roberson, and Gaylord, such challenges can interfere with the development process and potentially lead to behaviors such as substance abuse, violence, and poor school performance (Bluth, Roberson, & Gaylord, 2015). Other upsetting behaviors, such as suicidal thoughts, increased significantly between 2009 and 2011; up to 15.8% of American teens contemplated suicide in 2011 (Bluth et al., 2015). Adding other stressors such as poverty or exposure to violence at home can also increase the risk of maladaptive behaviors in teens such as violence (CDC, 2016). As if adolescence weren't difficult enough!

Mendelson et al. conducted three student focus groups to evaluate students' experiences of the mindfulness program in which they participated and whether or not they found such a practice useful. Their responses were generally positive, and students felt the skills they had acquired were useful in their day-to-day lives. (Mendelson et al., 2010). One teacher focus group revealed that some teachers, though not all, noticed changes in their students' behavior. Teachers also expressed an interest in learning more about the mindfulness curriculum so as to better reinforce those skills in their students. (Mendelson et al., 2010). Post-intervention averages for the adolescents showed "significant differences were found on three of the five subscales of this factor, including Rumination ($p < 0.01$), Intrusive Thoughts ($p < 0.05$), and Emotional Arousal ($p < 0.01$), and a trend in the predicted direction for Impulsive Action ($p = 0.07$) and Physiologic Arousal ($p = 0.07$)" (Mendelson et al., 2010). In addition, "The intervention group's reduction in involuntary stress reactions suggests that mindfulness-based practices were effective in enhancing self-regulatory capacities and in reducing activation and persistent or worrying thoughts for the youth" (Mendelson et al., 2010). It comes as little surprise that a practice that is beneficial for adults' physical and emotional help also benefits young adults in similar ways.

MINDFULNESS PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

The Holistic Life Foundation is a Baltimore-based non-profit organization devoted to fostering wellness through the use of mindfulness practices in underserved communities, particularly in elementary and high schools. They have been featured on multiple news sources, including NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams, PBS' Religion and Ethics Weekly, and Upworthy (Holistic Life Foundation, 2016a). They offer a variety of services, such as yoga classes and after school programs, but mindfulness is the core of those services. They currently serve over 14 schools in the Baltimore area. One in particular, Patterson Park High School, saw suspensions for fighting plummet from 49 in the 2012-2013 academic year to 23 in the 2013-2014 academic year, a 47% decrease (Holistic Life Foundation, 2016b). The attendance rate and average GPA of the school also saw marginal increases in the same span of time (Holistic Life Foundation, 2016b). One of the Holistic Life Foundation services Patterson Park High incorporated in their school is the Mindful Moment Room, a quiet place for distressed students to retreat and center themselves. Guidance counselors or volunteers are also made available in the Mindful Moment Room to assist students in talking through their feelings and reaching a state of calmness.

Not only has mindfulness been shown to be effective in other urban schools, mindfulness programs exist right here in the Mahoning Valley. Congressman Tim Ryan is a known proponent of mindfulness, inspired by a retreat he attended hosted by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Kabat-Zinn is a well-known advocate of mindfulness and is the founder of the University of Massachusetts' Center of Mindfulness in Health Care and Society. Ryan secured a \$982,000 earmark in 2009 that covered the cost of bringing mindfulness practices to nearly a dozen schools in both Warren and Youngstown, many of which continue to utilize those strategies to this day (O'Brien, 2012).

It is also important to note that a school-wide mindfulness curriculum benefits teachers as much as students. According to Meiklejohn et al., "personal training in mindfulness skills can increase teachers' sense of well-being and teaching self-efficacy, as well as their ability to

manage classroom behavior and establish and maintain supportive relationships with students” (Meiklejohn et al., 2012). Mindfulness programs present teachers with the same skills and coping mechanisms students receive, resulting in an increase in peace of mind and a better ability to cope with stress or frustration in and out of the classroom. Teaching mindfulness to both students and staff also allows for greater reinforcement of those skills, as students and teachers can remind each other to utilize mindfulness during moments of stress, which leads to better retention of these beneficial skills.

THE ACCESSIBILITY OF MINDFULNESS RESOURCES

As mentioned earlier in this proposal, mindfulness resources becoming increasingly more widely available as research continues to suggest its benefits. While nonprofits like the Holistic Life Foundation offer trainings and retreats for individuals, schools, and companies to learn more about mindfulness, or how to incorporate mindfulness programs in their respective areas, these retreats can be costly and require extensive travel. Such retreats are effective and allow for complete immersion in the concepts, but are also unnecessary; it is the digital age, and free information and programs on mindfulness abound on the internet.

A cursory YouTube search reveals hundreds of thousands of videos containing the word “mindfulness,” and Google produces over 45 million results for the same term. Nonprofit organization *Mindful* runs Mindful.org, a free-to-use website containing information on mindfulness, how to start a mindfulness practice, and guided meditations that help reinforce mindful habits (Foundation for a Mindful Society, 2015).

Dave Potter, a retired psychotherapist and certified instructor of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), has put together an eight-week course on mindfulness that is based on the program founded by Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The course contains a written manual, videos, readings, and guided meditation audio files. It is a comprehensive curriculum, completely free. Potter even notes in his Frequently Asked Questions that, if an interested individual does not have an internet connection, or lacks a connection fast enough to load the videos, he will mail a USB drive containing all the materials at no cost to the student. “A donation to cover the cost of the thumb drive and shipping (\$10 in the U.S., typically \$25 or so outside the U.S.) is appreciated, but if that’s not possible for you, I will send it to you free of charge” (Potter, 2016).

PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of this proposal is to combat the violence at East High School with a combination of Potter’s free eight-week MBSR course and an adaptation of the Holistic Life Foundation’s Mindful Moment Room. The use of Potter’s course would come at no cost to East High School and the curriculum could be easily incorporated into the classroom for the first eight weeks of the year, or offered as a supplementary class. However it is implemented, incentives such as extra credit may increase student interest, which is paramount to the program’s success.

Use of the Mindful Moment Room would act as a supplement to the program and could be a non-disciplinary alternative to detentions or suspensions for rowdy or distressed students. Again, there would be little to no cost to the school: The only requirement is a quiet room, though cushions or yoga mats may be provided for students to sit comfortably. If a guidance counselor is not available to be present for students in the Mindful Moment Room, a library of guided meditation recordings or copies of the readings in Potter's course could be used as a substitute at little to no cost.

Evaluation of the success of these programs would come in three forms. The first, a short-term evaluation, would be done in the form of student and faculty surveys. The survey would use a Likert scale to rate statements on a scale of "Strongly Disagree"=1" to "Strongly Agree=5." Such statements might include the following:

1. "The skills I learned in the mindfulness program increased my overall feeling of wellness."
2. "The breathing exercises I learned to calm myself were useful."
3. "I will continue to use mindfulness practices in my everyday life after the program has ended."
4. "I believe what I learned in this course will be useful in my everyday life."
5. "My mood has noticeably improved over the course of the mindfulness program."
6. "I am less depressed or anxious than I was before participating in the mindfulness program."
7. "I would recommend the mindfulness program to others."

These statements can be changed or adapted to suit the school's needs for evaluation.

The second form of evaluation would be to compare the number of violence-related incidents during the academic year, and the number of disciplinary actions taken against misbehaving students, both of which are records the school must keep anyway for the Ohio Department of Education. Tracking that data will allow East High faculty to determine whether or not such incidents are reduced after a mindfulness program has been implemented.

Finally, evaluating data such as the East High attendance rate, graduation rate, and average GPA will also help determine the success or failure of the mindfulness program. If such a program were to be successfully implemented, the research suggests that all three of these fields should see at least slight improvements.

CONCLUSION

School violence at East High School has become enough of a problem that local media has been paying attention. The fight in March described by WKBN as a riot exemplifies the urgency of this issue. It is hard not to ask how long it will take before this happens again, or if a future escalation of violence could result in serious injury or even death.

Students are not entirely to blame for such violence. In a city with such a high poverty rate, it makes sense that students are frustrated by their school's lack of resources, and the resulting lack of opportunities to succeed they feel they have. Students may also be exposed to violence or maladaptive behaviors such as substance in their homes or communities, given the severity of the opioid epidemic in the Mahoning Valley. In addition, the recent appointment of Youngstown City School District CEO Krish Mohip has led to tension between the new administrator and the school board, which was stripped of its legislative power and relegated to an advisory board for Mohip (Boney, 2016). Frustration is being felt at every level, and the result is an increase in violence and a decrease in student wellness and success.

Mindfulness has a mountain of research documenting its potential mental and physical benefits for both adults and children. Mindfulness teaches individuals to handle stress with a calm mind and to exist in the present moment, rather than ruminating on the past or the future. Nonprofit communities exist all over the country that train individuals and communities such as schools in mindfulness, and free resources also exist on the internet for anyone to access.

With tensions running so high from students to the CEO and board, a mindfulness program may be just the first step needed to heal such a broken school system. By teaching students and faculty deep breathing techniques and giving students a space to process and quell their heightened emotions, East High would essentially handing students and faculty alike the skills to control their emotions, respond positively to stress, and control themselves when so many other things in their lives are out of their control. If nothing else, the school and the officials charged with its care have nothing to lose in trying.

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