

# Northeast Independent Schools Mindfulness Conference Report

June 10, 2016

Hosted by Middlesex School in collaboration with the  
Independent School Health Association

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## About the Conference

The Northeast Independent School Mindfulness Conference was hosted, June 10, 2016, by Middlesex School in collaboration with the Independent School Health Association. The conference attracted over 80 faculty, school health professionals, and administrators from across the network of independent schools. All attendees were interested in:

- *supporting* the integration of mindfulness into their schools (grades 9 through 12);
- *advancing* their mindfulness programs;
- *learning* new approaches to mindfulness in schools;
- *staying up-to-date* on mindfulness practice and implementation in school settings;
- *continuing* a dialogue around effective mindfulness practice; and
- *promoting* health and well-being in schools.

Additionally, attendees had the opportunity to learn from representatives of several independent schools on their remarkable efforts to integrate mindfulness into their schools' cultures. Presenters illuminated a variety of vantage points through sharing their strategies and their schools' efforts toward integrating mindfulness throughout their communities.

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to **Middlesex School** and to **Kathy Giles** for hosting and supporting the conference.

Thank you to **all presenters** who shared their time, insights, enthusiasm, and expertise at no cost.

Thank you to **Pam Bishop** for her outstanding assistance and support throughout the preparation, development, organization, and production of the conference.

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## Summary of the Conference

The morning session included succinct presentations from members of several schools, including a welcome by Doug Worthen and an introduction to mindfulness by Jessica Morey. In the afternoon, breakout sessions allowed for attendees to have more detailed dialogue with presenters and address the variety of benefits and challenges encountered when integrating mindfulness into school communities. Afternoon breakout sessions also provided an opportunity to dive into topics of interest related to mindfulness in independent schools.

### Presentations

## Welcome and introductions by Kathy Giles, Doug Worthen, and Miguel Marshall

Kathy Giles, Doug Worthen, and Miguel Marshall made a warm introduction about the conference. Kathy Giles, Head of Middlesex School, welcomed everyone with the purpose of the conference and shared initiatives that Middlesex has taken to better enhance the health and well-being of those who attend and live at the school. Mrs. Giles talked more about the Mindfulness Program, which is one of the school's health initiatives. She explained how the program supports the school community in cultivating a sense of well-being, balance, focus, and emotion regulation, and that the school values these evidence-based practices that are especially important for healthy brain development in teens.

After Mrs. Giles's introduction, Doug Worthen honored the generosity of the many presenters, all who have freely offered their time to travel to Middlesex and present, which was why the conference was so financially accessible. Then, Will Zimmerman, a Middlesex School student, guided attendees and presenters in a 5-minute meditation session as a way of anchoring the focus of attendees and initiating a sense of peace to the day. Shortly thereafter, Miguel Marshall introduced the presenters participating in the morning session of the conference.

## On the importance of personal practice with Jessica Morey of iBme

Jesscia Morey, the Executive Director of Inward Bound Mindfulness Education (iBme), presented about the importance of personal practice in teaching mindfulness and on the value of retreat practice. Mrs. Morey then made the audience reflect on questions:

- Why are you here?
- Who were you as a teen?
- Who were your mentors?
- What were the qualities of your mentors?

These questions brought about rich discussions on the intentions of those in the room and what it means to be a mentor for youth. The group mentioned presence, connection, attention, curiosity, kindness, and compassion as qualities of great mentors. Ms Morey highlighted that these are all qualities cultivated by mindfulness. She also emphasized that retreat practice is a great platform to step out of the complexity of our life, to listen deeply to our body, mind and heart. Retreat practice is key if you plan to be a mindfulness teacher. Most teacher trainings require several retreats as a prerequisite. Ms. Morey also mentioned there are several mindfulness teacher trainings available, including the iBme Teacher Training starting June 2017.

## Carol Cahalane of Phillips Exeter Academy

Carol Cahalane, Chair of the Department of Health Education at Phillips Exeter Academy, gave a presentation on building resiliency, maximizing potential, and on finding our peace. Ms. Cahalane introduced the Mind/Body Program (M/B program) that was recently implemented at Exeter. The focus of the program is to help students and faculty find peace within themselves. Exeter's program also aims to challenge its cultural norms, which include programing students to achieve at young age.

According to Ms. Cahalane, Exeter's culture is to embrace excellence; yet, often the common sentiment shared among students is, *"I'm just not enough"*.

Exeter's Mind/Body program is intended to cultivate mindfulness in students and faculty, as well as reduce the stress levels present on campus. Ms. Cahalane shared, however, that the M/B program was not the first program aimed at enhancing student well-being. Indeed, she shared, there were several

**We identify more as human doers rather than human beings.**

-Carol Cahalane

initiatives that helped enhance student and faculty well-being. There are year-long health education classes that include stress management, religious services hosted weekly, and lunch-time yoga classes for employees. In 2005, the M/B Program was implemented. It offered an on-campus 2-day training conducted by the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine. Practices were integrated into Junior Studies courses, which then evolved into an interdisciplinary humanities course for 9th graders. Since the implementation of the M/B Program, the health education curricula were modified to include more time and emphasis on the Mind/Body Program and Positive Psychology.

At Exeter, adults continue to explore ways to bring research and practice into their work with students. In addition, there were activities such as customized relaxation recordings on intranet, library purchases, speakers addressing related topics, and staff attending conferences. Since its introduction in 2005, the Mind/Body Program has received positive feedback from students and faculty. Ms. Cahalane shared that the school plans to strategically expand the program and bring this information about its challenges and successes to a wider audience. Above all, however, Ms. Cahalane was proud to report that with Exeter's efforts and support, more students are saying, "*I am enough*".

## Carolyn Wagner of Pomfret School

Three years ago, Carolyn Wagner, School Counselor introduced a meditation group loosely based on her study of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) at UMass. This group was open to both students and adults in the community. It was part of the educational component of Pomfret School's counseling program the goals of which are to foster personal responsibility, healthy habits/relationships and lifelong engagement.

This past year, Ms. Wagner also developed a course on mindfulness that meets during the academic day. Initially, she faced a challenge in terms of finding an academic department that would support the implementation of such a course. Mindfulness is part of the school's overall mission so, philosophically, Pomfret School was ready to support this initiative. Eventually, she was able to secure a home within the religion department. Developing this course and allowing each programmatic step to frame the next, has been an exercise in mindfulness. Based on her experience, Ms. Wagner suggested a bottom-up approach wherein teachers work directly with students first before attempting programmatic or curricular change.

## Jonathan Crowley of Northfield Mount Hermon

Jonathan Crowley is the Associate Director at the Advancement Office at Northfield Mount Hermon School (NMH) and a vipassana teacher. Mr. Crowley began his presentation with the mission of NMH:

***Education for the head, heart, and hand. Northfield Mount Hermon engages the intellect, compassion, and talents of our students, empowering them to act with humanity and purpose.***

NMH's vision is to cultivate this mission through mindfulness practices across curricula and departments with various entry points for students, faculty and staff. For many years, NMH has hosted a Sunday night meditation class with mindful stretching for juniors and seniors, led by a faculty member trained in MBSR. In 2013, NMH hosted a 7-month training for faculty and staff bookmarked by two 2-day retreats. Twenty-two faculty and staff from eighteen departments attended, led by Florence Meyer, Director and Senior Trainer at the Center for Mindfulness at UMass Medical School in Worcester, and former parent. One of the faculty attendees subsequently trained in dot.B and offered four elective 9-week trainings to 45 students. The following year, NMH's mindfulness team was not able to secure funding and lost momentum. More recently, NMH's Health and Wellness Strategic Taskforce included mindfulness in its recommendations to the head of school and have established mindfulness in its mandatory freshman health class. Mindfulness is taught in the Humanities classes, to student peer health educators, and there is a zen garden and labyrinth on campus.

NMH's library hosts a [mindfulness libguide](#), a set of curated multimedia web pages for in-depth classroom research. The libguide is linked to an extensive library catalogue on mindfulness and includes streaming videos, twitter feeds, poetry and mindfulness trainings. Our goal is to secure continued funding for faculty that will develop their personal practice and confidence to implement mindfulness in the classroom.

**Education for the head, heart, and hand. Northfield Mount Hermon engages the intellect, compassion, and talents of our students, empowering them to act with humanity and purpose.**

-Jonathan Crowley

## Michele Grethel of The Spence School

Michele Grethel, Director of Psychological Services at The Spence School, presented the Mindfulness program for girls at Spence. The school has taken initiative to build the program within their Upper School by deepening students mindfulness skills from K - 8. The Spence's Mindfulness programming includes learning experiences in health 9, junior seminar, peer leadership, service and learning, retreats off campus, and a meditation club, as well as Afterschool programming. Located in New York City, students at Spence are taught a foundations mindfulness and mediation course.

In addition, they use the urban environment to enhance their skills, such as Anytime Anywhere; Out and About; and Mindful Commuting. Junior year students immerse in Mindfulness practice to support students' academic pressures. There are a variety of mindfulness activities that students can employ every day, Dr. Grethel shared. Those include mindful eating, walking, sitting, running, listening, and social media. Dr. Grethel enjoys using fun props for activities, and is known to juggle and engage students in object-focus meditation with stress balls and fun squeeze toys. The program is continuously evolving to meet the needs of students. Spence's program also encourages parents to participate in mindfulness retreats to cultivate their mindful parenting.

## Alan Brown of Grace Church School

Alan Brown, Class Dean at Grace Church School, started his presentation with the five-finger tracing breath. The 5-minute sit not only centered everyone but also energized them for a wave of new information and ideas. Brown introduced initiatives to enhance the attention for the students. There is mindful movement fitness class for the start for the day. In addition, academic skills are incorporated in classes with anxiety testing and how attention works. Brown also mentioned collaboration with the parent association in order to create an open door for the program.

According to Brown, there is a demand for more mindfulness events at GCS, which plays a crucial role in trust building among different beneficiaries. He also looked at Science, Philosophy, and Religion Departments and took what was relevant to the work. Brown also mentioned the tremendous opportunities for partnership in New York City. There is potential research partnership with New York University on mindfulness meditation. There are also mindfulness meditation groups around Grace Church School as well as Mindful School for curriculum creation.

**Just throw the balls and see where they stick. If you throw enough balls, things will stick and make connections. And that's how people connect. So I encourage you to keep throwing.**

-Alan Brown

As mindfulness has increasingly gained popularity on campus, Brown hoped that by cultivating mindfulness in everyday activity, the program would help students enhance their integrity. Brown's final remark for mindfulness educators who are trying to integrate mindfulness in school setting was:

***Just throw the balls and see where they stick. If you throw enough balls, things will stick and make connections. And that's how people connect. So I encourage you to keep throwing.***

## Clare Mottola of Ethical Culture Fieldston School

Clare Mottola, Instructor, Director and Theatre and Dance chair at Ethical Culture Fieldston School (ECFS), shared about a mindfulness program currently implemented on campus. Ms. Mottola began with the ideal of the school:

***It is not the adaptation of the individuals to the existing social environment; it is to develop an environment that benefits all individuals.***

That is an environment of mindfulness and healthy life style. The outstanding program that ECFS is running is Pre-K mindfulness. It's important to teach young kids about mindfulness, but it seems quite neglected in the field of mindfulness education. The program also focuses on neuro-scientific research and partnership with psychologists and nurses across campus.

In addition, ECFS educates its faculty in a gentle way and sees what catches their attention. With many different ideas and initiatives, ECFS promotes silent lunches, community course, and mindfulness – yoga practices. Students can get Physical Education credits for meditation and join mindfulness classes in Art and Science.

The touchstone of the mindfulness program at ECFS is junior and senior electives where they can explore different possibilities of mindfulness education. ECFS plans to get more financial supports to deepen and expand their current programs. They are also helping students look into Contemplative Studies at Brown University. A few words that Mottola shared with the audience was:

- Partnerships / relationships matter
- Invitation
- Model and embody
- Volunteer
- Let it be messy
- Evidence based
- Be a student
- Ground up

**It is not the adaptation of the individuals to the existing social environment; it is to develop an environment that benefits all individuals.**

-Clare Mottola

## Dan Scheibe of Lawrence Academy

Dan Scheibe spoke about developing mindfulness programs and cultivating a community-wide mindfulness sensibility from a broad and elevated point of view. In the one sense, mindfulness work is a natural outgrowth of a "practice-rich" community grounded in routine and the ritual development of behavior and identity. In another sense, all intentional, mission-oriented communities have a well-developed sense of practice (we even label athletic and artistic endeavors as "practice"). A broader sense of practice includes the way in which one's essential mindset and capacity of attention is developed in these communities. Again, careful educational practice has always been "mindful" of the ways in which attention is managed. Further, in moving from attention to "awareness," schools habitually broaden the notion of focus to include larger and larger contexts concerns, eventually including an interest in students as global citizens with a fully developed sense of awareness of the world around them.

Dan went on to describe the specific sense in which mindfulness can be promoted when a school administration stands firmly behind the program and the practice. Lawrence Academy took an "all-in" approach in its program, with all adults involved in leading mindfulness practice through advisory. All faculty meetings begin with a brief mindfulness practice. There are limits to the "more broad than deep" approach as well as limits when mindfulness practice is initiated in a top-down manner. Nevertheless, schools are in a position to identify which parts of their unique strengths and identities correlate strongly to the perspectives and benefits of mindfulness practice as a part of program and curriculum. Once these elements of institutional character are defined and mindfulness practice is considered, the school should follow the path that feels natural and sensible without getting too caught up in politics. The model at Lawrence Academy reflects a collaboration on a mindfulness research project and a model where institutional commitment arose more extrinsically (yet still corresponding with the school's fundamental identity, arising from a skill-based and experiential educational philosophy).

## Doug Worthen of Middlesex School

Doug Worthen concluded the series of guest speakers by sharing his experience as the Director of Mindfulness Programs at Middlesex. He explained how his role developed from teaching one voluntary class in 2010 to now being a full-time faculty member living on campus and supporting the Middlesex community - students, faculty, staff, parents, and alums - in mindfulness practice.

Worthen spoke of how important attending longer silent retreats were in his effectiveness as a teacher, and mentioned that trainings like dot-be (.b), Mindful Schools, MBSR, Still Quiet Place, and staffing iBme retreats are a great compliment to long retreats and daily practice. The mindfulness course at MX is now a required course for all new students and an average of 96% of the new students over the last three years have said it was a positive experience for them.

In addition, Worthen shared the many positives that come from having a full-time mindfulness faculty member and why it might make sense to have this position as a common role in schools. The mindfulness program now also has several different level courses for students, faculty, and staff, and in the advanced courses participants are learning to facilitate and guide mindfulness groups themselves. Each year the integration of mindfulness at Middlesex is being supported by a growing number of trained student and faculty mindfulness facilitators. Worthen also spoke of the benefits of the annual on-campus 4-day residential retreat for parents, faculty, staff and alums. He concluded with a link to a free 16-page document that has more details of the program <https://www.mxschool.edu/resources-schools>.

### Presenter Bios



## Alan Brown, M.A.

**Dean of Class of 2017, Humanities Teacher, Grace Church School**

Alan Brown is currently a Class Dean and humanities teacher at Grace Church School in Manhattan where he teaches mindfulness in the high school division, as well as leading programs for teachers and parents. He is the former Dean of Student Life at Dwight-Englewood School in New Jersey where he still currently runs summer mindfulness classes and immersion programs for their D-E 360 program. He is a frequent guest speaker on mindfulness to schools in the tri-state area.

Alan came to mindfulness as the “fidgety kid” and speaks openly about how his meditation practice has helped him nearly eliminate tics that come from having Tourette Syndrome and live a much fuller life. He is a consultant for Mindful Schools and holds advanced certifications in teaching mindfulness, positive psychology, and yoga.



## Carol Cahalane, M.Ed., MCHES

**Health Educator, Phillips Exeter Academy**

Carol, in her 26th year at PEA, has established with her colleagues a comprehensive, student-centered health education program. Carol has lead efforts to introduce students to multiple means of self-care, including meditation and mindfulness. Since 2005, she and her colleague, Connie Morse, MSW, have coordinated PEA's Mind/Body group which fosters means for adults in the school community to develop their own and their students' mind/body practices. She lives and works on PEA's campus, where she teaches, advises the Student Council and the peer health educators, does committee work and is a dormitory adviser

Carol and her husband are the proud parents of three active children, and she is a part-time Irish dance teacher. All in all, Carol is well-versed on the struggles and deep benefits of finding ways to build mindfulness and meditation practices into a full and busy life.

## Carolyn Wagner, M.A.Ed.

### **Social Issues Teacher and School Counselor, Pomfret School**

Carolyn started her career at Pomfret in 1997 and has since become an integral part of student life. In addition to her role as School Counselor, Carolyn is the coordinator of the Student Support Group, which meets on a weekly basis to evaluate and review student life issues. She facilitates a meditation group that meets bi-weekly. Carolyn's undergraduate study in psychology led to an unusual program at Rhode Island School of Design, where she received a departmental award for developing a course curriculum on the creative process and brain functioning.

Carolyn's more than thirty-five years of experience working with youth include the New Hampton School, New Hampton, NH, the Youth Assistance Program in Tilton, NH, the Youth Services Bureau in Laconia, NH, Butler Hospital/Brown University, and the Rhode Island School of Design. She just completed a 5-year program at UMASS Medical School and is now a trained MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) teacher. She and her partner Mike operate Hamlet Hill Farm a USDA certified organic farm in Pomfret.



## Clare Mottola

### **Chair, Theater and Dance Department, Ethical Culture Fieldston School**

Clare Mottola is currently The chairperson of The Theatre and Dance Department at The Fieldston School where she has been teaching 1998. When not at Fieldston, Clare is a Yoga Teacher at Yoga Haven in Westchester, New York where she also runs both their Kids' Yoga Teacher Trainings and their Mindful Matters Programs. At Fieldston, Clare proudly began The Mindfulness Initiative in 2013 with colleague, Palma Repole, an endeavor that seeks to create both a cultural shift and educational opportunities.

Clare has happily studied with Jack Kornfield, Dan Siegel, and studied school-specific mindfulness curriculum through Mindful Schools. She received her 200 Yoga Teacher Certification and Kids Yoga Certification at Yoga Haven.





## Dan Scheibe, M.Div., M.A.L.S.

### Head of School, Lawrence Academy

Dan became the 45th Head of School at Lawrence Academy (founded in 1793) in 2012. Prior to joining the Lawrence community, Dan was the Assistant Head of School at Middlesex, having worked there for 14 years in a variety of roles, including leading the chapel program, teaching, coaching, and enjoying the usual expressions of life in a residential high school community. During his time at both schools, Dan was intimately involved in the introduction of mindfulness programs. Each came to fruition in very different culturally-sensitive ways that balanced the organic with the systematic. Dan holds a M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary, a M.A.L.S. from Wesleyan University, and a B.A. from Yale University.

Dan's wife Annie has deep experience in school communities as well, and they happily live on campus with their sons Tad, Peter, and Hans and their daughter Lilly (now in college). Dan sees mindfulness work as having profound effect from personal levels to professional levels to the broadest levels of educational principle and practice.



## Doug Worthen

### Doug Worthen Director of Mindfulness Programs, Middlesex School

Doug is the Director of Mindfulness Programs at the Middlesex School in Concord, Massachusetts and has been teaching mindfulness at Middlesex since 2010. He has completed several mindfulness teacher training programs and attended 1-3 month-long mindfulness retreats. Doug began practicing mindfulness meditation in 1999 as a member of the UVA national championship lacrosse team and has been a dedicated practitioner ever since. Living through two bouts of lymphoma, which included a bone marrow transplant in 2007, Doug has experienced firsthand the healing power of mindfulness.

To download a document about the mindfulness program at Middlesex visit <https://www.mxschool.edu/resources-schools>

## Jessica Morey, M.A.

### **Executive Director of Inward Bound Mindfulness Education ("iBme")**

Ms. Morey began practicing meditation at age 14 on teen retreats offered by the Insight Meditation Society (IMS). She returned every year for 6 years and then participated for 10 years in an IMS young adult meditation mentoring group. Jessica has attended longer retreats (1-3 months) in Asia and the U.S., and is a founding board member and lead teacher for Inward Bound Mindfulness Education teen retreats across the U.S.

Before joining iBme, Jessica worked in clean energy and climate policy and finance. She holds a BA in Environmental Engineering from Dartmouth and Masters degrees in Sustainable Development and International Affairs. Her published works range from the chapter "Ordinary Awakening" in Blue Jean Buddha to Conflict Resolution of the Boruca Hydro-Energy Project: Renewable Energy Production in Costa Rica. More recently she wrote an article in the February 2014 Mindful Magazine, "Finding My Way," about her experience learning and benefiting from mindfulness throughout her young adult years.



## Jonathan Crowley, M.B.A.

### **Associate Director of Capital Giving, Northfield Mount Hermon School**

Jonathan began practicing insight and vipassana meditation 30 years ago. He first studied at the Insight Meditation Society, then with S. N. Goenka and was appointed an assistant teacher at the Vipassana Meditation Center in Shelburne MA in 2002. He has taught and served courses for children and teens; managed courses for executives; helped established a course retreat center in Dharamsala, India; organized and served 10-day meditation courses at three US correctional facilities.

Jonathan's service work was featured in the film The Dhamma Brothers, an award-winning documentary about introducing a 10-day vipassana course at Alabama's highest level maximum-security state prison. His graduate thesis was on the topic of Sustainability Leadership and Vipassana Meditation. Jonathan has been assisting an initiative to bring mindfulness training to faculty staff and students at NMH since 2013.





## Michele Grethel, Ph.D.

**Director of Counseling Services and Upper School Counselor,  
The Spence School**

Dr. Grethel is a school counselor, educator, consultant and a psychotherapist providing mental health and wellness education to adolescents, young adults, and families. Dr. Grethel is clinically trained in utilizing diverse techniques grounded in Mindfulness including evidence-based Dialectical Behavioral Therapy and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, as well as, Relational Therapy and body-centered treatment. Over the last 20 years, she has integrated her clinical skills with insights gained from her own meditation practice to form strong partnerships with young people learning to manage their identity, mood symptoms, behavioral dysregulation, including self-harm, and suicidality.

In the classroom, she incorporates Mindfulness skills into life-skill development; academic pressures, stress, anxiety, substance and violence prevention and nutritional wellbeing. Recently she co-authored "A multi-method exploratory study of stress, coping, and substance use among high school youth in private schools". As a city dweller, she has developed the art of teaching 'Urban Mindfulness' within the fast pace of a city environment.

Dr. Grethel completed a B.A. at Syracuse University and earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Social Work from New York University. Prior to her work in schools, Dr. Grethel was the director of the adolescent and young adult medical and mental health program at the Callen-Lorde Community Health Centers. She has had a private psychotherapy practice in NYC since 1999. She lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with her partner and her two daughters.



