



# ZENworks Yoga

In-person and online school based yoga and mindfulness programs to develop self-regulation, manage stress and anxiety, and increase academic attainment



## Introduction

At ZENworks Yoga, we know yoga and mindfulness can be game changers in and out of the classroom. When compared to exercise alone, yoga encouraged improvement “across measures of anxiety, self-regulation and adaptive skills” (Weaver, 2015). A study conducted in Vancouver public schools also found that as a result of introducing mindfulness practices “82 percent of children reported having a more positive outlook, 81 percent learned to make themselves happy, and 58 percent of children tried to help others more often.” (Schwartz, 2016) The same study also found that students “improved more in their cognitive control and stress physiology; reported greater empathy, perspective-taking, emotional control, optimism, school self-concept, and mindfulness, showed greater decreases in self-reported symptoms of depression and peer-rated aggression, were rated by peers as more prosocial, and increased in peer acceptance (or sociometric popularity)” (Schonert et al., 2015). In this white paper we will dive deeper into the positive effects yoga and mindfulness practices can have on students’ self-regulation, stress and anxiety management, and dealing with behaviors caused by trauma both in and beyond the classroom. We will also show you how daily yoga and mindfulness practices can help boost academic success.

## Increase Self Regulation

Mindfulness has been credited with significantly improving executive functioning, especially in self-regulation.

**Self-regulation is one of the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Flook et al., 2010). “An even stronger predictor than IQ, self-regulation in beginning years of life is one of many functions that can predict math and reading achievement in elementary and middle school” (Deshpande, 2016).**

Interestingly, a study conducted by Lisa Flook of elementary students found that students who demonstrated the highest level of difficulty with executive functioning also had the highest rates of improvement with mindfulness intervention (Flook et al., 2010). Our students who struggle with regulating their own behaviors and emotions do have hope for improvement.



## **Improving self-regulation in students can help decrease the need for disciplinary action.**

In fact, rather than relying on “zero tolerance” discipline policies, mindfulness is being incorporated increasingly in classrooms in the US and abroad like the Mindfulness in Schools Project in the UK, and even replacing detention in some cases. At Patterson High School in Baltimore, suspensions were reduced dramatically by weaving mindfulness practices into its school culture.

## **Manage Stress and Anxiety**

Practicing yoga in the classroom or online with ZENworks Yoga can help students manage stress and anxiety, behaviors which can manifest in the classroom as lack of focus and misbehavior. Anxiety and stress are all the more prevalent in today's society, and notably among students in the classroom. Students face increased pressures due to factors including, but not limited to: high-stakes testing, constant stimuli bombardment from plugged-in lifestyles, difficult life situations, and reduced physical activity. In the No Child Left Behind Act era, the Center for Educational policy reported an average loss of 50 minutes of recess time across the United States. These factors make it more challenging for students to focus in school and handle the complexities of adolescence both at school and at home (McMurrer, 2007). ZENworks yoga allows students to make physical activity and mindfulness a part of the classroom's routine. Daily yoga and mindfulness teaches students how to connect with and calm their own anxiety and stress, which leads to better behavior and increased focus.

## **Help Cope with the Effects of Trauma**

Feeling heartbroken, a pit in the stomach, and tightness in the chest are a few of the many symptoms students feel when experiencing the effects of trauma--it's no wonder that these factors clearly inhibit academic performance. Indeed, Van de Kolk highlights that the effects of trauma in children result in in off-task behavior, disengagement, and poor relations with peers (Van der Kolk, 2014). However, the regular use of yoga in the classroom can reverse these effects, allowing for a healthier and more productive classroom environment.

Trauma can manifest itself in off-task behaviors and disengagement, as well as inability to connect with other people. Yoga can help people manage effects of trauma, essentially working to combat the negative effects of trauma by encouraging them to get them on-task, engaged and connected. In his research, Dr. Van der Kolk, a leading author on healing trauma with yoga, found that ten weeks of yoga practice markedly reduced symptoms of trauma in patients who failed to react to other methods of treatment (Van der Kolk, 2014).



In addition to yoga, research supports activities that increase mindfulness practices as an effective way to build resiliency in universal populations. Mindfulness offers benefits to all who practice, no matter the baseline. (Greenberg et al., 2012). Being mindful of sensations of trauma and stress helps people gain control of them. This control can have lifelong benefits to every child in every classroom.

## Use Yoga and Mindfulness to Boost Academic Success

In addition to helping with self-regulation, stress and anxiety management, and managing the effects of trauma, there is a direct tie from yoga and mindfulness practices to academic attainment.

**Yoga and mindfulness practices such as guided visualization and breathing exercises produce the spacing effect, which is proven to help students learn. (Watson, 2015).**

The spacing effect means that information is better retained when the student is provided an ample rest period in between learning something new and reviewing it again instead of simply learning a concept in a larger, concentrated block. When children learn a new concept and then participate in mindfulness practices, the mindfulness practice provides a rest period that increases long-term retention. Yoga and mindfulness exercises are effective brain breaks when utilizing the spacing effect in the classroom to improve academic performance.

Yoga as physical exercise is also a proven tool to boost academic success. A comprehensive study conducted by Amika Singh, PhD, in 2012 found that physical activity improves academic performance. By sampling several studies across the globe, Singh found that physical activity improves heavily tested areas such as math, reading and science. The use of ZENworks Yoga in the classroom can have a direct positive effect on your student's academic outcomes.

## Conclusion

ZENworks Yoga can be easily incorporated into students' daily routine through our in-person and online program. Teachers may access the online program during brain breaks, morning meetings, before or after assessments-- whenever their students need to refocus, recharge, or relax in 5- short minutes throughout the school day. If you want to keep things more personal, we can bring the yoga directly to the classroom with one of our professional yoga instructors that will help guard the class. ZENworks Yoga looks forward to partnering with you to create ready-to-learn students in a more focused, engaged, and collaborative classroom.



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