Take A Deep Breath

Kids learn ways to calm the mind

PAY ATTENTION. SIT STILL. Focus. Who hasn’t heard those words and wondered, “Okay, how?” Grace Kramer, 10, says her school, Fritz Elementary, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is teaching her the way.

Grace’s school participates in Wellness Works, a program in which students receive “mindfulness training.” Kids learn deep breathing, visualization, movement and relaxation techniques. This school year, Wellness Works’s instructors will teach 15 classes a week at five schools in Lancaster.

Fritz Elementary is just one of a growing number of schools across the country to introduce programs in mindfulness training. A 2005 study by the Garrison Institute, a nonprofit group that promotes reflective practices, highlighted similar programs in Colorado, Massachusetts and Washington.

Steve Reidman, a fourth-grade teacher at Toluca Lake Elementary, near Los Angeles, California, says he’s a “firm believer” in the benefits of mindfulness training. His students take a class with InnerKids.

The program “is all about stress reduction, anger management and focus,” Reidman told TFK. He says it has also helped students do better on “high-stakes tests.”

“Kids feel the pressure to perform,” says Fritz Elementary principal Colleen Hovanec. She hopes mindfulness training will help students on standardized tests and in daily life. So far, “it’s working,” she says. “I’m seeing the payoff.”

Grace is seeing results too. “I would get fed up with math,” she says. “Now, I don’t get overstressed about one little problem.”

—By Jaime Joyce