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La Clinica provides mindfulness training at two Medford schools

La Clinica and Medford School District have signed an agreement to bring mindfulness training aimed at creating calmer classrooms to elementary students and teachers at two Medford schools.

The seven-week series started this month at Oak Grove Elementary School and will start at Jackson Elementary in March. Classes aim to help pupils learn to recognize and regulate their emotions. The goal is reducing disruptive behavior.

La Clinica Wellness Coach Ginny Miller provides basic instruction in mindfulness techniques including breathing exercises, being still, mindful eating, and being kind. She is offering lessons four days a week for two first-grade classes, a second-grade class, and one kindergarten class at Oak Grove and will focus on four early elementary classrooms when she heads to Jackson Elementary next.

The program grew out of a successful pilot project proposed in the spring of 2018 at Oak Grove. In the pilot project, Miller led first- and fifth-graders in brief classroom sessions designed to teach them to be present and thoughtful. Both teachers and students reported good results.

“This work is in line with our efforts in developing trauma-sensitive schools and in working with students in developing coping strategies and our staff in developing alternate strategies to support our diverse student bodies,” said Tania Tong, Medford School District director of special education and student services.

“The teachers had positive feedback,” said Outreach Director Ed Smith-Burns, noting that disruptive behaviors decreased so teachers had more time for educational activities. “Students said they used the techniques at home and shared them with their parents, helping them navigate sometimes chaotic existences outside the classroom.”

With support from district officials including Oak Grove Principal Liz Landon, La Clinica proposed expanding the program to another school it serves with a school-based health center. The second phase also includes six weeks of training for up to 15 teachers. They will gain a basic understanding of mindfulness techniques and tools they can share with students and other educators.

The schools and La Clinica will track behavioral referrals in hopes of seeing a decrease. Mindful Schools, a California-based organization offering mindfulness training in schools, points to studies that have shown mindfulness can improve focus and participation in the classroom, reduce stress, and make students more compassionate.

About La Clinica

La Clinica offers medical and dental care at 21 sites: six primary health centers, East Medford Dental Clinic, 13 school-based centers, and in a mobile center. Although its mission focuses on providing access to low-income people, La Clinica is open to everyone. La Clinica was founded in 1989 to serve the primary and preventive needs of the migrant and seasonal farm workers in Jackson County. In 2001, in response to an increasing need for affordable primary health, La Clinica expanded its scope to serve every member of the community. All services are offered regardless of a patient's ability to pay, and on a sliding-scale basis for the uninsured and low income.