



The Wellness Initiative

Learning from our Students

a note from the Executive Director, Mara Rose

Another school year has come to an end and we at The Wellness Initiative are cleaning mats, reviewing evaluations, setting goals for the year ahead, and beginning a strategic planning process that will chart our growth for the next 5 years. But before we move on to the future, I want to take a moment to reflect on the last year by highlighting what our students tell us about the impact TWI's programs have on their lives.

I recently had the opportunity to spend a day interviewing our students. I spoke with almost 100 students and asked them what they like about the TWI program, how TWI has impacted their lives, and how they use the new tools we've given them outside of our classes. The students' ages ranged from 7 to 18 years old and, although they cited a wide range of benefits, one constant among every student was a clear articulation of how yoga is not just about poses and postures, but a tool that helps them address real, pressing challenges in their lives.

We all know that students struggle with stress, physical health and obesity, anger and bullying, drugs, alcohol, teen sex, academic achievement (and the

pressure that goes with it), depression, anxiety, low self esteem, and other challenges. What I heard over and over were stories of how yoga helps our students deal with all of these challenges and pressures—from the 3rd grader who uses it to let go of sadness and anger, to the 1st grader who says yoga makes her happy; from the gay high school student who says it makes him feel better about himself, to the 4th grade athlete who says it makes him more flexible; from the 5th grade student who uses hummingbird breath to focus and perform better on tests, to the 2nd grade girl who uses it at home when she's fighting with her parents; from the teen boy who says it makes him feel proud of himself, to the 3rd grade girl who says doing yoga makes her "inner self" come out.

To hear these stories straight from the mouths of our students is humbling and leaves me even more committed to TWI and the work we do to give children in Colorado new tools to lead happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives.

If you'd like to listen to some of our students explain why they love yoga, please visit www.wellnessinitiative.org to watch a short video in the Events & News section.



"I love yoga because it gives me a chance to be who I really am."

ABOUT THE WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Students of all ages suffer from increasingly stressful lives and they often lack the opportunities and tools to relax, reflect, strengthen, and focus. This reality negatively impacts their self-confidence, relationships with others, physical health, and academic performance.

In response to this persistent and growing problem, The Wellness Initiative was founded in 2006 to deliver secular wellness programs to elementary, middle, and high school students through public schools in Colorado. We bring yoga and stress management

programs into Colorado's public schools to improve the physical, mental, and emotional health of children and young adults. We also offer trainings to help classroom teachers integrate simple yoga techniques and exercises into their classrooms.

We have worked in more than 25 schools since 2006 and served more than 2,500 students. We plan to reach more than 1,700 students in 17 schools in 2009-2010. Please consider volunteering with us, providing in-kind donations, and providing financial support.

Get in Touch!

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To donate to TWI visit
www.wellnessinitiative.org



TWI At a Glance

2008-2009 SCHOOL YEAR

- 1,447 students served
- 13 schools served
- 137 teachers educated
- 21,217 student hours of yoga delivered
- 861 yoga classes taught

Board of Directors

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Partner Schools 2009

Brown International
Elementary School
Colfax Elementary School
Columbine Elementary
School
Crest View Elementary School
Florence Crittenton School
KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy
Louisville Middle School
Mesa Elementary School
Peak to Peak
Charter School
Southmoor Elementary
School
University Hill
Elementary School
Welby New Technology
High School
Whittier Elementary School

WHY OUR STUDENTS LOVE YOGA

Answers from middle school students at KIPP Sunshine Peak Academy in Denver

Q: What is yoga?

- A:**
- Yoga is where you can trust yourself and become more of who you are.
 - Yoga is where you relax, and learn to connect your mind, body, and breath.
 - Yoga is a peaceful thing to do when you are stressed.

Q: What are some good things that happened to you from doing yoga?

- A:**
- I trusted myself.
 - You can be more confident.
 - I can concentrate in class.

{ On a scale of 1-10 how much do you like yoga? }

1,000,000,000,000,000,000 }



"I like yoga because it calms me down and it is very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very fun. [Yoga helps me] be more flexible and mindful about my breath, body and mind."

Q&A WITH THE COLORADO HEALTH FOUNDATION

The Wellness Initiative's biggest foundation supporter, the Colorado Health Foundation, recently granted the organization \$40,000 through their Healthy Living priority. This is the third year in a row that the Colorado Health Foundation has supported TWI financially. We spoke with Senior Program Officer for Healthy Living, Khanh Nguyen, to discuss the Colorado Health Foundation's goals and partnership with TWI.

Q: Why did the Colorado Health Foundation choose to support TWI for the third year in a row?

A: One of the Colorado Health Foundation's goals is to increase the number of children who engage in moderate or vigorous physical activity. And one of our strategies for attaining this goal is to work with schools; The Wellness Initiative has strong partnerships with schools in both Boulder and Denver counties.

Q: How do TWI's efforts fit with the priorities of the Colorado Health Foundation?

A: The Colorado Health Foundation's vision is to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation and one of the ways we hope to attain this is to invest in programs that promote healthy living, such as physical activity, nutrition, preventive health care, and chronic disease management. The Wellness Initiative is increasingly engaging more students in physical activity through their ongoing school-based yoga programs.

Q: How do you see the two organizations working together?

A: Colorado is one of the few states in the nation that does not mandate physical activity in schools. TWI has been successful in incorporating physical activity into the school day and we look forward to learning about their work with teachers, students, and school leadership on their school-based yoga programs.

