

Feeling Fortunate

The school year seems to be flying by! At The Wellness Initiative, we have much good news to report, and we're feeling very fortunate. Our students are too; one middle school student recently told us, "I like yoga because it reminds me of my happiness."

We feel fortunate to be expanding our programs. During the 2010-2011 school year, we expect to teach 2,125 students and 350 educators in 25 schools, delivering more than 44,000 student hours of yoga and providing students and teachers with new tools to lead healthier, happier lives. Just two years ago, we were serving only 6 schools and 550 students; this growth is a testament to the increased understanding of the benefits of yoga for children, for educators, and for our educational system.

We feel fortunate to be deepening our programs. Recently, we received a generous two-year grant from the Colorado Health Foundation. With this support, we are implementing our 60/30 program, where we provide a minimum of 30 classes per year to students in schools where at least 60 percent of the students live below the poverty line. The program enables us to reach individuals who may not otherwise have the opportunity to learn and practice yoga, while also increasing our ability to have a meaningful and lasting impact on our students.

We feel fortunate to be increasing our internal capacity. We have a new staff member. On December 1, Kristi Gall

joined TWI as our new program director. With a strong background in yoga and yoga therapy, as well as business, management, and marketing, Kristi will manage our teachers, volunteers, and many of our school partnerships. She brings a deep understanding of the transformative powers of yoga and a commitment to sharing that wisdom with students. To learn more about Kristi, please visit www.wellnessinitiative.org/team.

We feel fortunate to provide a service that has a measurable and lasting impact on our students. Well under way, our evaluation effort has yielded encouraging results (highlights below). We are committed to measuring the impact of our programs so that we know what is working and what isn't—and so that we can use real evidence to convince those who still have their doubts that yoga programs can improve kids' lives. After taking yoga classes:

- 70% of a group of 47 students said they felt more positive and optimistic, and 52% said they were nicer to other kids at school.
- 71% said they used visualizations to help them feel better, and 62% reported using breathing exercises to help them feel calm.
- 74% said their physical flexibility was better, and 61% felt physically stronger.

TWI is surrounded by a talented and supportive community. Our teachers are committed and professional, our supporters are consistent and truly invested, and our school partners are advocates and champions. As 2010 winds down, we can't help but to feel optimistic and encouraged. Thank you for rallying around TWI and helping us bring yoga to so many students—and helping them each feel, as one student describes, "like an eagle when I do yoga."

— Mara Rose,

TWI Executive Director



INSTRUCTOR NOTEBOOK

This fall, The Wellness Initiative is building a new relationship with the Apollo Program (in the Littleton Public Schools), a self-contained special education classroom for sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders with mental health challenges that interfere with their school success.

At the beginning of each class, the students and I push the desks aside and roll out our yoga mats, transforming the classroom into a peaceful and calm environment. We start with a breathing exercise. Each student takes a turn leading the activity and receives feedback from the group. This experience helps build the classroom community, bringing everyone together and developing self-confidence. During this time, I'm pleased as students make announcements to the class, apologizing for their behavior that day and explaining how they are going to refocus their energy or work better with their classmates.

We then begin our sun salutations. Initially, when we started our classes, the group didn't want anyone to know they were doing yoga. Now, students request to lead the salutes, which is a big accomplishment and a testament to their growth.

Each day I arrive in the classroom, I am honestly not sure what to expect from the students. However, since we began this fall, I have already noticed that the students are becoming stronger and more stable in their poses, and that they always leave class calmer, emotionally stronger, and more positive.

— Kim Oliva, TWI Instructor





CHILD'S POSE with KAILEY – a yogi & student at GALS

This fall, TWI began a partnership with the Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS), a new charter school in Denver. GALS integrates academics and physical movement in a healthy, competitive environment, helping girls develop knowledge through lessons in well-being, leadership, courage, and commitment.

In the GALS curriculum, the role of movement serves two primary purposes: 1) to optimize learning potential; and 2) to boost students' overall physical health and wellness. As part of GALS's movement curriculum, TWI teaches yoga to every student in the school one morning each week. You can learn more about GALS at (galschools.org).

We recently chatted with Kailey, a yogi and student at GALS, about her experiences with yoga and how it has affected her life.

TWI: What is your favorite yoga pose or activity, and why?

Kailey: I like birds of paradise because it's fun and complicated.

TWI: What are three words you'd use to describe yoga?

Kailey: Calming, fun, happy.

TWI: What does your body feel like after your yoga class?

Kailey: Calm and relaxed.

TWI: What does your mind feel like after your yoga class?

Kailey: Empty.

TWI: How has yoga impacted your life?

Kailey: Yoga has made me calmer and made me a better person. It's like.... It's hard to explain. I guess I have a clearer head and can work through problems better.

WINTER 2010-2011 PARTNER SCHOOLS & PROGRAMS

ADAMS COUNTY

Hanson Elementary School
High Point Academy

ARAPAHOE COUNTY

Apollo Program

BOULDER COUNTY

Columbine Elementary School
Creekside Elementary School
Crest View Elementary School
Fairview High School
Flatirons Elementary School
Mesa Elementary School
New Vista High School
Southern Hills Middle School
University Hill
Elementary School
Whittier Elementary School

DENVER COUNTY

Colfax Elementary School
Florence Crittenton School
Girls Athletic Leadership School
Schmitt Elementary School

IN GRATITUDE

TWI would like to acknowledge and express our appreciation to two of our generous in-kind supporters. **EKS&H** (eksh.com), the largest Colorado-based accounting and business consulting firm, provides us with monthly accounting services, free of charge. To help us quantitatively measure the impact of our programs, the **Center for Policy Research** (centerforpolicyresearch.org), a nonprofit research agency based in Denver, has donated its invaluable evaluation services. Both groups provide us with top-notch services and play a significant role in helping us grow, raise funds, and function as a professional organization. Thank you!

EKS&H
EHRHARDT • KEEFE
STEINER • HOTTMAN PC

CPR
Center for
POLICY
RESEARCH

SUPPORT THE WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Imagine if you'd had the opportunity to practice yoga as a child. What if, as a 6-year-old, you knew how to breathe deeply when you got angry or frustrated? Picture yourself as a teenager, feeling confident about the shape of your body and your ability to manage your complex and changing emotions. Imagine if your fifth-grade teacher knew how to calm down and focus the class before a test. What if, from an early age, you had the tools to manage your stress, control your anger, and treat others with kindness and compassion? How would this have changed your life? Please support The Wellness Initiative and change the lives of thousands of children today. You can donate online at www.wellnessinitiative.org. It's quick and easy, and we appreciate any contribution you can make.

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 K-12 students in Colorado. **The mission of The Wellness Initiative is to improve the physical health, social and emotional development, and academic performance of low-income youth through yoga-based wellness programs.** We expect to serve 2,125 students and 350 educators in 25 schools during the 2010-2011 school year.

Get in Touch!

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