

How Goddard Middle School Gained State Recognition in Academics Through Mindfulness-Based Social Emotional Learning (MBSEL)

BACKGROUND

Goddard Middle School is located in Littleton, Colorado, and serves students grades 6-8. Goddard has the highest percentage of special education students, students experiencing trauma, and students on the free lunch program than any other school in the district.

“We have a unique demographic where we have students who come from very poor families, and students who come from very wealthy families. Bringing all of these kids from different backgrounds together can raise issues,” says School Counselor Jenica Loether. “But diversity is one thing that makes our school great.”

Goddard implemented the Inner Explorer program at no cost through the generosity of LG Electronics USA. Both educators and counselors started using the program in classrooms and small group sessions. Within two years of using Inner Explorer, Goddard saw a substantial increase in school-wide academic performance. LG Electronics USA continues to support the use of Inner Explorer at Goddard Middle School today.

3X

Average increase in the number of students who met or exceeded expectations in ELA, compared to Colorado's increase.

3X

Average increase in the number of students who met or exceeded expectations in Math, compared to Colorado's increase.

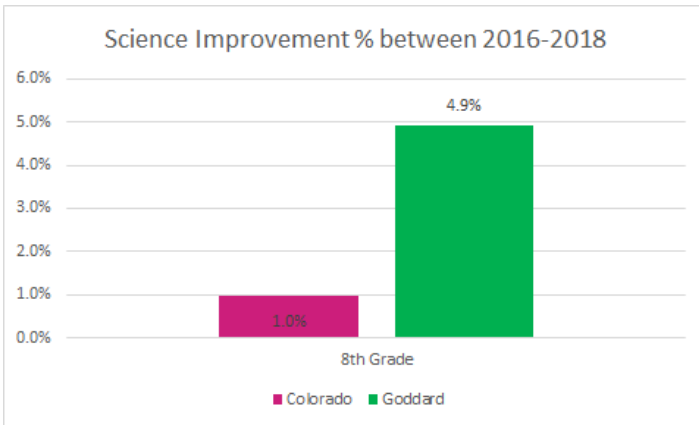
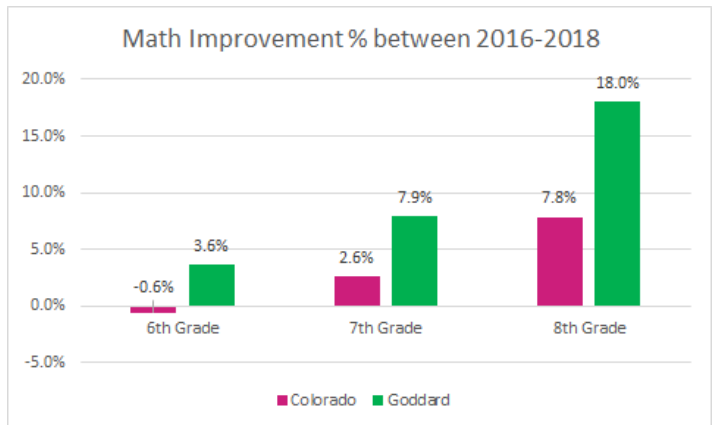
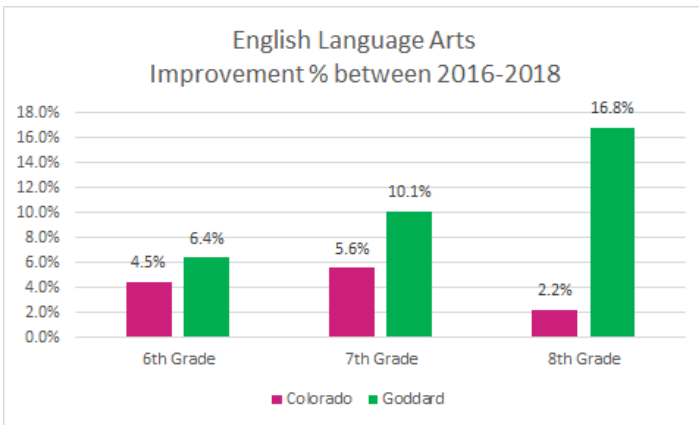
5X

Average increase in the number of students who met or exceeded expectations in Science, compared to Colorado's increase.

The results were so significant that the **Colorado State Department of Education** contacted the school principal to find out what they were doing – Goddard was **outperforming most middle schools in the state with the same demographic profile**. The principal credited the results to practicing **mindfulness through Inner Explorer**.

RAPID IMPROVEMENT IN ACADEMICS

Between 2016 and 2018, the average percentage increase of Goddard 6th-8th grade students who met or exceeded expectations in **English Language Arts** and **Math** was **3X higher** than the average percentage increase for Colorado as a whole. **Science** was **5X higher**. Most notably, the percentage of students who met or exceeded expectations in **8th-grade English Language Arts** was **8X higher** than the state.



Before Inner Explorer, staff at Goddard Middle School were already facilitating social emotional learning (SEL) lessons. After Inner Explorer was introduced, the focus shifted to incorporating Mindfulness-Based Social Emotional Learning (MBSEL) into every classroom to support student and educator well-being.

WHY MBSEL?

Traditional SEL curriculum is designed to activate the prefrontal cortex (PFC), otherwise known as the brain’s executive center. However, **when the brain is stressed, the prefrontal cortex becomes inactive.**

As a result, a person is unable to access what they cognitively know, making them prone to reactivity. **MBSEL programs target this disconnect by teaching strategies to self-regulate during moments of stress.**

MODIFICATIONS FOR A UNIQUE POPULATION

Goddard began implementing 5-10 minutes of daily MBSEL practice through Inner Explorer, either before or after teaching a lesson on SEL. This allowed students to calm down and prepare for learning before the lesson, or enhance what they had just learned by reflecting on it during mindfulness.

Considering Goddard's high percentage of students facing trauma and adversity, in addition to special education students, the school needed an approach that catered to their population. School staff worked together to brainstorm a strategy to integrate a mindfulness practice for these students in a way that was sensitive to their needs.

In situations where a student feels upset or has an emotional outburst, the teacher asks the student to sit in an area where they feel safe and listen to a mindfulness practice until they feel ready to talk about the situation. Students who feel uncomfortable closing their eyes or sitting still are encouraged to color or doodle while they listen to a mindfulness practice. As a result, teachers noticed that students were more calm and less reactive during the day.

EDUCATING SCHOOL STAFF AND FAMILIES

Goddard leadership ensured that school staff and families were knowledgeable about mindfulness and answered any questions they had about practicing Inner Explorer. They accomplished this by holding a presentation about MBSEL, discussing the research and benefits.

"Mindfulness skills are **easy to learn** through Inner Explorer, and the daily practice is an activity that our teachers and students look forward to. Teachers notice that **students are calmer** throughout the day when they begin with a mindfulness practice. I actually use the skills I have learned through mindfulness while I am at work or at home; when I have a frustrating moment, I stop myself and **self-regulate** through a mindfulness exercise, like deep breathing."
-School Counselor

Key Findings from Goddard can help any school community integrate MBSEL:

- **Elect a champion** who is dedicated to making the program a success.
- Brainstorm how an MBSEL program can **complement an existing program**, such as SEL lessons. This will make the transition easier for students and educators.
- Adapt the program to **meet the needs of the students** within the community.
- Communicate the "**why**" and "**how**" of an MBSEL program to families, ensuring they have an opportunity to **ask questions**.

To learn more about Inner Explorer MBSEL programs, visit www.InnerExplorer.org.