

Jennifer Monness's Meditation Lab in Our Local Schools

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“I want my students to be the best versions of themselves they can be when they finish a lab.”

Two year ago, certified yoga instructor and meditation instructor, Jennifer Monness, began teaching her meditation practice to varsity and junior varsity Irvington high school teams. The year before, she had brought her idea of teaching meditation to Irvington high school's athletic director, Artie McCormack. He quickly came on board, starting her program with one team – the school's storied girls basketball team, the Bulldogs, and with Coach Gina Maher's generous approval. The instant success of her in-house class helped spread yoga and meditation instruction to Irvington's teams, throughout all seasons, thanks to support from the Irvington Boosters Club adopt-

ing her program.

Monness has lived in Irvington for 20 years, and her six children have attended or are currently in the village's public schools. "My kids helped me design my classes – I want all ages to be excited about doing yoga stretches and meditation." Students have busy schedules with after-school activities, athletic practices, testing, and social pressures, so relieving stress and clearing their minds make sense, especially if the program occurred in the school gym, outdoors at athletic practice, or on the stage.

What started with one team quickly became a school-wide initiative. "We *all* want to be the best we can be," said Monness, so with the support of the Irvington Education Foundation (IEF), the PTSA and local non-profits, meditation labs spread to theatre and music groups. Then the IEF awarded Monness a series of grants for a trial practice at the middle school level last November and to run the program in all Irvington physical education classes.

Riverstone Yoga's owner and instructor at her Tarrytown studio, Patricia Fischer, and long-time friend of Monness, is planning to offer meditation workshops to her teachers, so she asked Monness to run teacher training sessions. Fischer, always interested in advancing her instructors' knowledge base, is introducing her fall youth and family programming and wants a mindfulness practice incorporated into her new classes. Thanks to Fischer's outreach and Monness's teaching expertise, mindfulness will become a unique element in each yoga teacher's class.

Monness had also done teacher training in the Dobbs Ferry schools, teaching tools and techniques to balance energy. Teachers need to balance stress too.

Last January right before mid-terms, Monness made sure her students had their own meditation systems in place before testing began. Students arrived early for their test, taking time to turn on their Insight Timer app, put their headphones on, listen to the music of their choice for 3 minutes, guided by the bell of their choice to start and finish their practice. Once done, they were

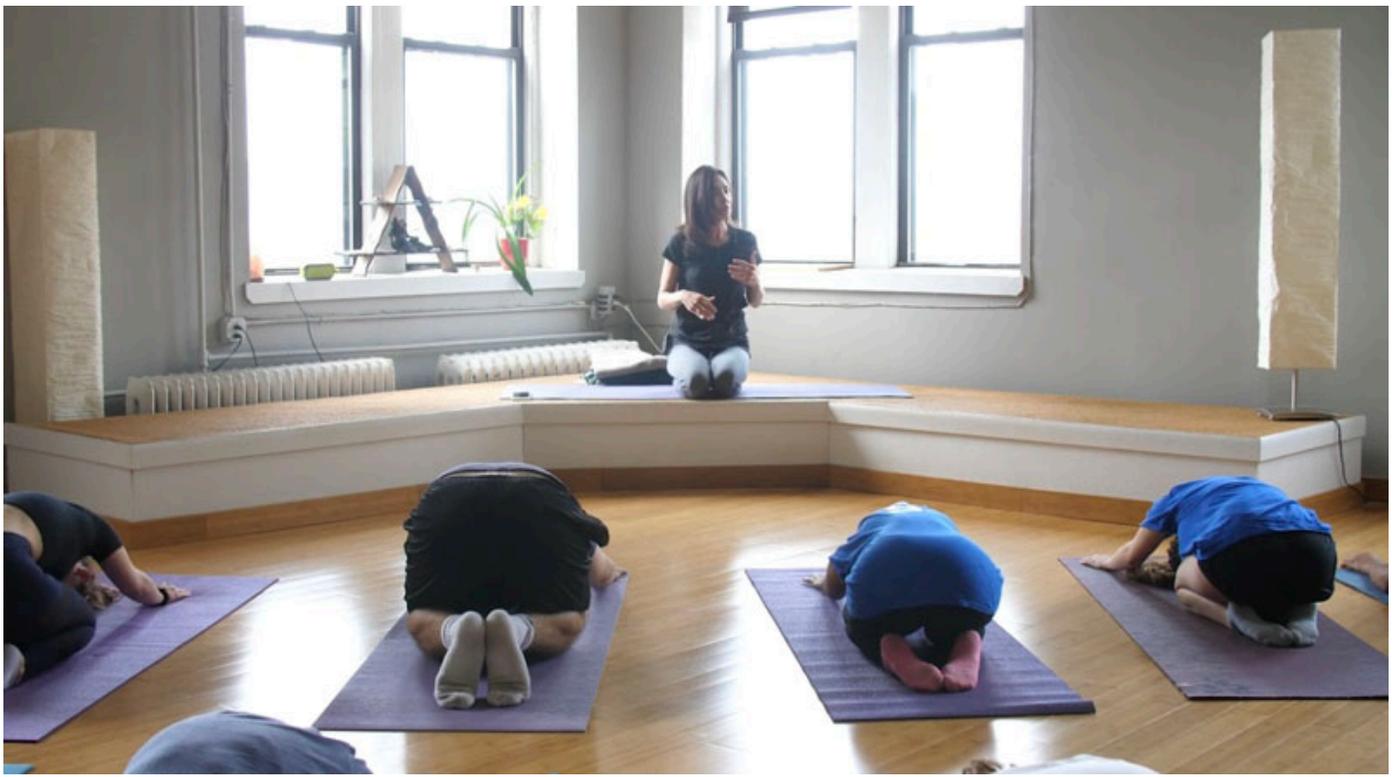
relaxed and ready for testing. “Students were actually excited about meditation, gaining a connection to a relaxation piece in their day,” Monness noted.”They enjoy inhaling a break in their classes, having time to stretch and relax on the mat in the lab, reconnect with their breath and calm down.” Whether in an academic class, on the playing field, or on a stage, meditation provides a natural way for students to refocus, recenter and gain confidence.

In these stress-filled days, everyone – not just students- needs a meditation lab.

For more information and photos, please visit: themeditationlab.org

















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