



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Jennifer Monness sits on the playground at Dows Lane Elementary School in Irvington.

# Meditation teacher soothes frayed nerves

By Jackie Lupo

With families on edge about the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus, it can be hard to relieve stress without leaving home. To help people cope, Irvington resident and yoga instructor Jennifer Monness has turned to the internet.

The 52-year-old, who has been teaching her Meditation Lab program in Rivertowns school districts since 2016, has produced a series of meditation videos being used by school communities from the Rivertowns to New York City. She is also scheduling live online meditation sessions.

Monness, who has lived in Irvington since 1998 with her husband, Bill, has been teaching yoga and meditation to adults for 23 years. She launched a meditation program for teens at her Yoga Works studio on Main Street in 2016, with input from the couple's six children, whose ages range from young teens to young adults.

With funding from the Irvington Education Foundation (IEF), her meditation classes grew, first into an after-school club, then to training for Irvington High School athletic teams, and then to a part of the physical education curriculum for grades 6-12. The IEF also sponsored "mindful meditation" sessions for adults.

Since then, her work with school systems has grown beyond Irvington.

"I've been going into various schools throughout Westchester, the Bronx, and New York City doing my Meditation Lab," she said. In Westchester, she expanded her in-school lessons from Irvington to include Hastings, Dobbs Ferry, and Sleepy Hollow pub-

lic schools, plus The Masters School in Dobbs Ferry and Hackley School in Tarrytown. With a grant from the Archdiocese of New York's ADAPP drug abuse prevention program, she brought meditation lessons to three parochial schools.

"I'm proud that there's been such a positive reception," she said, "because

I'm just trying to share these tools and techniques with students to help them navigate the ups and downs of life as a teenager, which can be very stressful."

Facing the Covid-19 crisis, she wondered how she could continue with her lessons. "I said, 'This is what I have to

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

## Meditation

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

be doing, it's my mission."

She sent an email to Kristopher Harrison, the superintendent of Irvington schools, and to teachers she had worked with in Irvington, and shared her idea. "Everyone was incredibly receptive about offering my program as one of a menu of things Irvington students would be given the opportunity to do while they are home," she said. She produced three videos, which became available the last week of March. Each school district is providing its families with a link to the videos.

The videos are suitable for use by anyone, from kindergartners to adults. "There's no age attached to them," Monness said. "Whether you've meditated for a long time or if you've never meditated before." She plans to record

additional videos next month.

Monness also reached out to other school districts, with the option of the prerecorded sessions or live sessions on the Zoom video-conferencing platform. Dobbs Ferry and Hastings signed on for the videotaped sessions. School systems are finding charitable sources to fund the lessons, such as donations from PTAs.

"I would love the opportunity to be teaching live more in the Rivertowns," she said. "I have Zoom capacity for up to 1,000 participants."

For the Pleasantville School District, she is teaching six live classes a week via Zoom. "We have teachers that join the live sessions with their students," she said. "The students are so excited to see their teachers."

At Xavier High School in Manhattan, "The headmaster comes on to the Zoom at the beginning," she said. "It's a wonderful way to bring the school community together. It's beautiful."