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# San Francisco Schools Transformed by the Power of Meditation

Silence isn't something people usually associate with middle school, but twice a day the halls of Visitacion Valley School in San Francisco fall quiet as the sixth, seventh and eighth grade students meditate for fifteen minutes.

And school administrators tell NBC News that the violence outside of the school, which is situated in one of San Francisco's poorest neighborhoods, was spilling into the school and affecting the students' demeanor.

"The kids see guns on a daily basis," the school's athletic director, Barry O'Driscoll said, adding, "there would be fights here three-to-five times a week."

With a typical schools days filled with mayhem, O'Driscoll was skeptical when the San Francisco Public School District partnered with the Center for Wellness and Achievement in Education to introduce a meditation program, called "Quiet Time," to four of its schools, including Visitacion Valley.

"I thought this is hippy stuff that didn't work in the '70s, so how's it gonna work now," O'Driscoll said. But he changed his tune, when over a four-year period, suspensions decreased by 79 percent and attendance and academic performance noticeably increased.

Blocks away at Burton High School, which was once dubbed "Fight School," the results have been similar. Principal Bill Kappenhagen was skeptical at first, as well, and had to wrangle with the problem of when in the school day to grab a half hour for quiet reflection.

"I was like, 'There's no way I'm going to steal time from English instruction or math instruction in order to do that,'" said Kappenhagen.

Instead, he decided to extend the school day by 30 minutes for meditation time, which resulted in better academic performance and a 75 percent decrease in suspensions. And students say they're more conscious of their actions, calmer and less angry.

While Kappenhagen recognizes that "there is no magic wand in education, just like in life," meditation has been found to increase focus and stimulate a sense of calm, not just during the quiet time, but also for the rest of the day, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Kappenhagen says he know's he can't change the environment the students live in when they're not at school, but he's glad he's discovered a way to "help our students find ways to deal with violence and the trauma and the stress of everyday life."

For more information, contact [www.cwae.org](http://www.cwae.org)



Students at Visitacion Valley School in San Francisco meditate, as part of a program in which students meditate for fifteen minutes twice a day. NBC News

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