

Students learn to be kind to their minds at J.E. Cosgriff Memorial Catholic School

SALT LAKE CITY — Since 2019, J.E. Cosgriff Memorial Catholic School has embraced the MindUP program, benefiting both students and staff. This initiative has been made possible through a donation from a Cosgriff family. Through the donation, Cosgriff teacher Raquel Austin became certified in the MindUP program. Each week, she visits classrooms from kindergarten to eighth grade to teach MindUP lessons that align with the school's monthly virtue, emotional intelligence and character development themes. Additionally, during announcements every Thursday morning, she leads the whole school in a "brain break."

MindUP is an evidence-based program that has been proven to enhance prosocial behaviors, reduce aggression and boost academic performance. It is designed for children aged 3 to 14, and teaches students about their brains and how they work. Students learn how to regulate their stress and emotions, form positive relationships and to act with kindness and compassion. This aligns perfectly with Cosgriff's 2024-25 theme, "Let Your Light Shine," reminding students that acting with kindness and regulating their emotions allows their light to shine brightly.

In November, students delved into the concepts of mindfulness and unmindfulness, relating them to their own experiences. Mindfulness is about paying attention to the present moment — being aware of what's happening around us and recognizing our thoughts and feelings without judgment. It's like being a scientist, observing with curiosity and openness, without labeling experiences as good or bad.



Raquel Austin, MindUP trainer at J.E. Cosgriff Memorial Catholic School, teaches a class.

Courtesy photo/J.E. Cosgriff Memorial Catholic School

Practicing mindfulness means focusing on the present. On the other hand, being unmindful means acting without thinking or being unaware of our surroundings — like doing things on autopilot without considering the consequences.

In October, the Cosgriff community highlighted the powerful virtue of perseverance that they had focused on for the month. All grades had the opportunity to learn about Chuck Aoki, a Paralympian

who excels in wheelchair rugby and has medaled in the sport. Chuck's story is a powerful reminder that perseverance is not only about overcoming physical challenges, but also about continuing to push through difficulties, whether it's winning a medal or simply finding a new way to solve a problem.

When people persevere, their brain rewards them with a sense of accomplishment, which in turn encourages them to keep going. This positive feedback loop helps build resilience, whether people are tackling an athletic challenge or simply trying to solve a tricky math problem.

Cosgriff students say the following

about the MindUP program: "It helps me calm down, and it's nice to know Mrs. Austin cares about us enough to do that." and "I think MindUP helps me get ready to learn and helps me stay more focused."

Parents also compliment the program, saying, "I love having this as part of the curriculum for my kids. They've both benefited from it and need it. Thank you for all your work in providing this for them. I appreciate it!"

Another parent said, "My kids have started using mindfulness practices at home independently when they get upset. It's such a valuable life skill. Thank you!"

Yet another parent echoed these sentiments, saying, "I'm so glad to see the school focusing on social and emotional learning as part of our children's well-rounded education."

A fourth parent said, "I just wanted to say how grateful I am that Cosgriff students are learning these important mental health practices early in life. I liked this summary so much that I shared it with some adults I work with as a reminder to focus on their mental health. Thank you!"

Cosgriff teachers have seen firsthand how MindUP fosters optimistic classrooms, encouraging mindful attention to oneself and others, tolerance, empathy, gratitude and connection. Recognizing the equal importance of social-emotional learning alongside academics, the entire Cosgriff community has embraced the MindUP curriculum.

Courtesy of J.E. Cosgriff administration

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