

Om for Kids

Mindfulness and meditation exercises are helping the next generation get an edge in the classroom

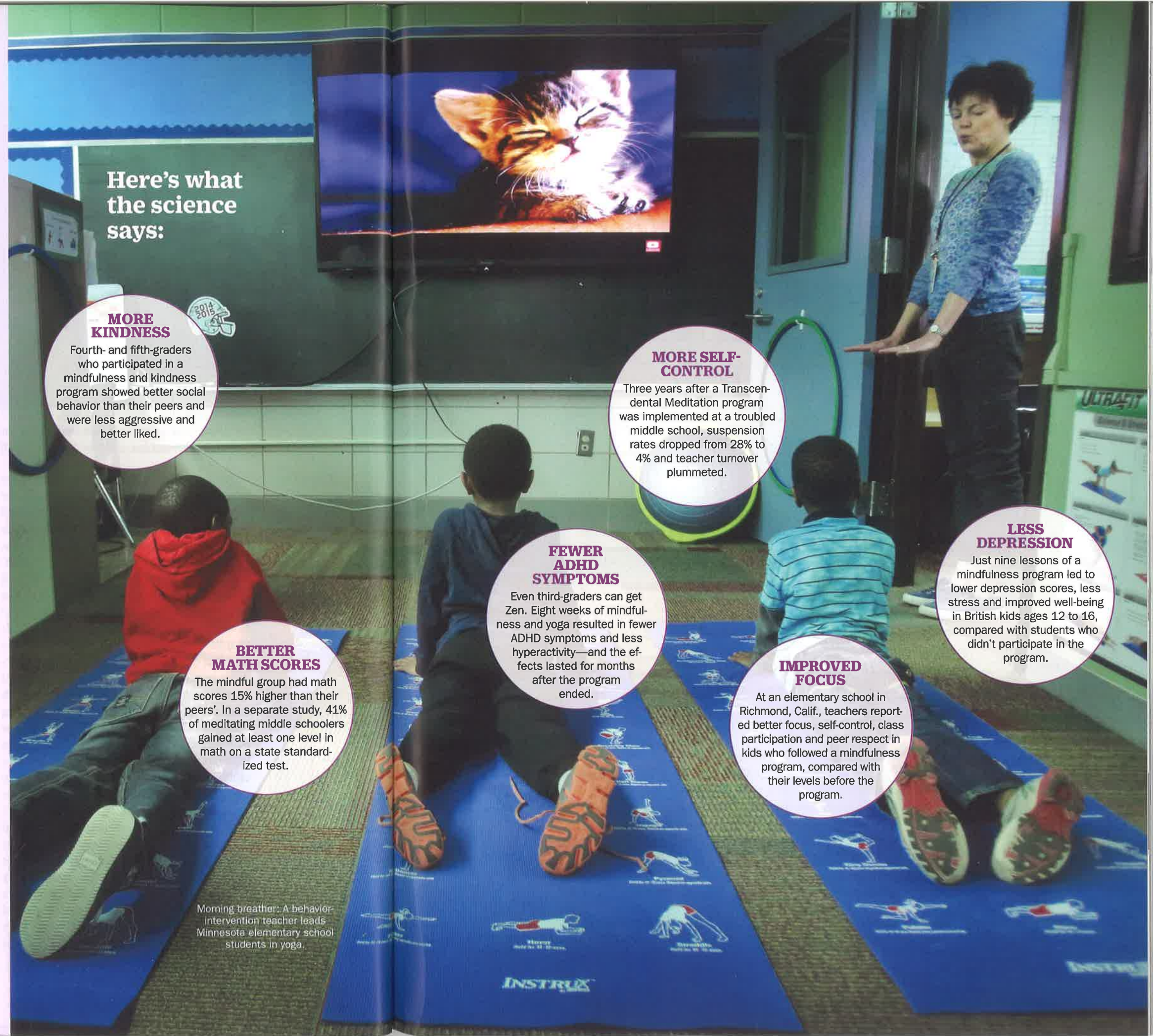
BY MANDY OAKLANDER

ANY TEACHER WHO'S EVER PRODDED, begged or bribed a child to sit still and listen knows there aren't a ton of proven ways to get a kid to tune in. But new research offers a different suggestion: breathe. Not you—they.

Mindfulness and meditation programs are emerging as powerful ways to calm down kids, sharpen their brain and make them kinder to their classmates. The many techniques appear to work in kids who are so young, they've yet to meet their first fraction. In an ongoing study at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, scientists are teaching preschoolers yoga poses and meditations, and after just two weeks of practice, these kids have better attention, awareness, gratitude and happiness compared with a control group of children. "What's amazing is that this brief exposure appears to be so powerful," says lead researcher Simone Nguyen, a developmental-psychology professor at the university. "A few minutes of breathing, a few minutes of paying attention to the moment are appearing to make a difference." Children tend to be more open-minded than adults and less entrenched in habits—smartphones, social media—that distract from the present moment, Nguyen adds.

Techniques like these seem to work for kids all the way up to high school seniors. Other research hints that Transcendental Meditation leads to improved graduation rates: 15% higher, one study found. Seemingly idle time may have a place at school after all.

Sources: *Developmental Psychology*; *Education*; *Journal of Positive Psychology*; David Lynch Foundation; *British Journal of Psychiatry*; *Journal of Child and Family Studies*



Here's what the science says:

MORE KINDNESS

Fourth- and fifth-graders who participated in a mindfulness and kindness program showed better social behavior than their peers and were less aggressive and better liked.

MORE SELF-CONTROL

Three years after a Transcendental Meditation program was implemented at a troubled middle school, suspension rates dropped from 28% to 4% and teacher turnover plummeted.

FEWER ADHD SYMPTOMS

Even third-graders can get Zen. Eight weeks of mindfulness and yoga resulted in fewer ADHD symptoms and less hyperactivity—and the effects lasted for months after the program ended.

BETTER MATH SCORES

The mindful group had math scores 15% higher than their peers'. In a separate study, 41% of meditating middle schoolers gained at least one level in math on a state standardized test.

LESS DEPRESSION

Just nine lessons of a mindfulness program led to lower depression scores, less stress and improved well-being in British kids ages 12 to 16, compared with students who didn't participate in the program.

IMPROVED FOCUS

At an elementary school in Richmond, Calif., teachers reported better focus, self-control, class participation and peer respect in kids who followed a mindfulness program, compared with their levels before the program.

Morning breather: A behavior-intervention teacher leads Minnesota elementary school students in yoga.