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Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho to be honored as 'Ambassador of Mindfulness'

BY FELIPE RIVAS



Miami-Dade County Public Schools Superintendent Alberto Carvalho will be honored Thursday by Mindful Kids Miami during the group's first Ambassador of Mindfulness luncheon.

Mindful Kids Miami is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of children by giving them access to mindfulness skills. The organization is honoring Carvalho for his support of providing mindfulness training to more than 200 educators from 100 schools during the 2015-16 school year.

"Mindfulness is a research-based approach, that allows students to be reflective, meditate, find themselves and their thoughts, and then allows that moment to be shared with others," said Carvalho, who will receive his award at the Rusty Pelican restaurant in Key Biscayne.

Mindfulness is the deliberate cultivation of moment-to-moment attention and awareness, also known as "being in the present moment." Educators who voluntarily complete the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program, an eight-week course provided by Mindful Kids Miami, can incorporate mindfulness exercises into the class curriculum as they see fit.

Through teacher-led mediation and engaging breathing exercises, students learn to regulate their emotions, with the purpose of reducing impulsive behavior, stress, hostility and attention-deficit issues. The mindfulness exercises also feature a component of kindness and empathy for the students to internalize and practice.

Dr. Rosa Inguanzo, an advanced-placement Spanish literature teacher at Miami Senior High School, practices mindful exercises with her students often.

“I try to incorporate the exercises seamlessly into my lectures,” Inguanzo said. “Sometimes at the start of class, or before a test, or towards the end of class, as long as we complete them without taking away from lecture time.”

Children who are exposed consistently to the mindfulness practice respond well to the program and tend to request it when not exercised as often.

“I’ve been doing it for two years now,” said Ariel Trueva, an 11th grader who is one of Inguanzo’s students. “Mindfulness has supported me mentally and helps me alleviate the stress that I have from both academic and extracurricular activities.”

Several other supporters also will be recognized at the luncheon, including Principal Shelley Stroleny of G.W. Carver Middle School and student counselor Maria Elena Diaz de Villega of Miami Senior High. Stroleny, who serves on the board of directors for Mindful Kids Miami, describes mindfulness as a skill that students can develop.

“Today, life is hectic, there is so much ‘noise,’ that if you can learn to calm yourself down and focus, you can experience life fuller and be more effective, and this is a skill,” Stroleny said. “It is a skill that students can learn, and it makes them better because you stop yourself from getting frazzled.”

Diaz de Villega, who is set to retire at the end of this school year, wants to spend her retirement as a part of the Mindful Kids Miami program. “I want to keep on doing mindfulness and train the teachers,” she said.

Miami-Dade Public Schools is the third-largest school system in the country. Carvalho believes it is essential to expand the mindfulness program in schools throughout Miami.

The mindfulness program is a viable and low-cost solution to reduce stress and anxiety for both educators and students alike. Also, parents have been open and supportive of the program because they have seen the results, he said.