



**Blame Game Is Severe Side-Effect**

Why are so many public officials rushing to close public schools and ban big gatherings?

Why are some companies planning to tell employees that if they sneeze once, they'll be sent home?

And why can't the drug companies hurry up with coronavirus tests, vaccines and drugs to treat symptoms?

Welcome to the blame game. If you suspect that it's causing as much harm as it is providing help, you may be a winner.

Don't get me wrong: I know too many public servants, both locally and at the state level, not to believe they are worried sincerely about their constituents. Ditto for the corporate world.

COVID-19, the coronavirus, is bad stuff. It already has killed thousands around the world. No American government official or company executive wants to lose between 1% and 4% of his or her constituents or employees.

Compassion really is the top priority in the decision-making process.

But COVID-19 needs to be put in perspective. At this writing, the disease had killed about 5,000 people worldwide. Common influenza this season alone has claimed at least 20,000 lives, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated.

Which brings the blame game up: You may remember a few years ago when the federal government, whose scientists tell drug companies what kinds of flu vaccine to manufacture, caught holy hell because the lab folks had guessed wrong. That year's vaccine didn't protect against all the right strains of flu.

Already — see criticism of President Donald Trump's actions — some politicians are playing the blame game. Can you blame a governor for thinking that if he doesn't act decisively right now, he'll be blamed for anyone who dies of COVID-19 in his state?

Back to the drug companies. A substantial portion of their expenses involves trying to guard against lawsuits. Produce a COVID-19 test that results in too many false negatives, and guess who gets sued?

Distribute a vaccine that has serious side-effect — ones that didn't show up in preproduction testing — and watch the trial lawyers line up.

Is it any wonder that distribution of some drugs is delayed by months, even years, so companies can test, re-test and re-test again? And, not just incidentally, do you wonder why the Food and Drug Administration sometimes takes its good old time in approving drugs?

Meanwhile, demand that the government do something about delays.

COVID-19 isn't the first time and it won't be the last in which the blame game has an oversized, possibly dangerous, effect.

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Photos Provided  
 Glen Dale Elementary third grade teacher Jenny Finley conducts a Mindful Moment with her students Addy Dierkes and Chloe Weekly (from left, front row) along with Braden Storm, Hayden Harvey and Kenzie Lysecki (from left, back row).

**QUIET the MIND**



Pictured from left: Washington Lands Elementary students Brayden Crow and Luca Sturgill look over mindful game activity cards during recess.



Pictured from left: Washington Lands Elementary students Griffin Sturgill, Annabel Newland and Easton Newland look over the parts of the brain.



Pictured from left: Glen Dale Elementary third graders Owen Whisler, Alivia Markonich, Braxton Emery, Savannah Lewis and Dennis Bannon line up to share their gratitude with each other while their teacher Jenny Finley listens to their responses.

*Marshall County Students Learning Benefits of 'Mindfulness'*

By ALAN OLSON  
 Staff Writer

GLEN DALE — While students in some Marshall County schools are studying to enrich their lives and pass their tests, they're also "taking five" to center themselves and think before they act — more skills which will help them throughout their lives.

Through the Mindfulness program, students at Glen Dale Elementary and Washington Lands Elementary are developing not just academic proficiency, but basic day-to-day skills to help them keep a cool head under pressure. The program is undertaken in partnership with Youth Services System.

Any Tucker, counselor at Glen Dale and Washington Lands elementary schools, said the school district pursued the Mindfulness program due to feedback from students reporting increasing anxiety.

"We were interested in bringing it because so many students report anxiety across the board, and we wanted to give them some strategies," Tucker said. "The teachers were trained in Mindfulness, and the teachers are really the heroes, the implementers. They're willing to provide on a daily basis, the children with two 'brain breaks' each day, which is a form of meditation, a quiet moment. ... The children start out learning about their brains leaving kindergarten, and they can tell you about their brains. It's pretty amazing — they can talk about their amygdala, their prefrontal cortex."

The younger students, impressed by their knowledge of the brain, have a habit of talking about brain anatomy at home, according to parent feedback, which amused both parents and faculty.

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grade. The faculty members said that they were interested in the program because they could bring the program to other schools in the district. Goddard said that if schools requested their inclusion, it could be done, but it would not be done at the discretion of the district or YSS.

"We're going to make it, because it does require a lot of commitment from the people in their building," she said. "Your teachers, your staff, you need to be committed to the effort. I commend both these schools, because it takes a lot of effort to do this. So you need a school where you have that kind of commitment to carry through. You need to be true to it, and follow through to the very end."

The program was funded through the Marshall County Board of Behavioral Health through Youth Services System's prevention department.

Washington Lands Principal Julie Sturgill said that students, part a challenge in maintaining mindfulness, which Sturgill said is a good thing, as that means the students are being stimulated.

"Often, they'll say, 'It's hard for me.' I tell them, it's good that you're saying that. All too often, students nowadays want to opt out if it's too hard. It's good that they're trying to improve some self-control, so it's benefiting a lot of those students who might act out, or be disruptive, or have behavioral issues," she said. "It decreases the risk factors associated with poor decision making, early substance use, and gives a belief that you can do it, and follow through to the very end."

Berthany Goddard, program coordinator with YSS, said the program was implemented over the course of two years. But she said the program has shown the abilities of both students and faculty in being mindful of their mental state.

"Our mission is to work with students to improve their emotional skills to reduce risk factors, and this program gave us an opportunity to help children in school," Goddard said, adding that the program especially focused on "tier 2" students, those who exhibit risk factors that may develop into delinquent behavior. Tier 3 students are those who already exhibit this behavior in a clinical sense.

"Our overall goal in our school systems is to bring those students from the tier 2 and tier 3 level to the tier 1 level," she said. "It decreases the risk factors associated with poor decision making, early substance use, and gives a belief that you can do it, and follow through to the very end."

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Parent Susan Harrison agreed, and said that once a fifth-grader at Washington Lands Elementary enjoys the program especially the "brain breaks" which provide a brief reprieve from the school day.

"The teacher strikes a chime, and the kids can sit there and concentrate on the sound of a bell, and then they can pay attention to their breathing," Robison said. "It definitely gets you ready for a test. She also talked about attention spans, how each attention span is different, and use that to get better at it. They're learning the brain breaks, the reticence, and later lessons they'll learn about gratitude and kindness — these are life lessons. It's going to help them in every stage of their life, and hopefully bring back their attention, they're able to do that, and we, as adults, could all use a little more mindfulness."