

“With violence prevention, you need to get upstream to be preventative. We’re doing that by **teaching students to deescalate** and how to share this information with others.”

- Matt Nink, SKY Schools

## SUCCESS STORY

# SKY Schools'

## Stress Reduction Curriculum

Employing stretching, movement and breathing to improve emotional and physical wellbeing.



## About SKY Schools

## Violence Prevention Grants

In the summer of 2022, the Greater Milwaukee Foundation dedicated an initial investment of \$1 million to support urgent healing, community-building, and violence prevention efforts. The Milwaukee Succeeds-led Youth Forward MKE Coalition received \$100,000 of this funding to invest in youth-identified programming that increases access to mental health supports and creates more equitable and inclusive school environments, helping to solve the lack of youth voice and ownership.

Youth Forward MKE is **disbursing funds to multiple projects**: the Youth Voice Summit, Milwaukee Community Schools School Lunch/Nutrition Project and Sky Schools. Each of these projects will be highlighted in their own success story.

SKY Schools is a stress reduction curriculum that includes breathwork, yoga, conflict resolution and life skills.

The curriculum seeks to empower teachers and students to create a healthy body, a healthy mind and a healthy lifestyle by offering practical life skills as well as specific techniques to manage stress and emotions. The SKY Schools curriculum includes stretching and movement, plus targeted breathing techniques proven to calm the stress response and increase focus, regulate emotions and resolve conflicts.

Implemented at two local high schools, Pathways and North Division, the SKY Schools programming focused on breathwork with students and staff. The goal was to teach participants how to deescalate and regulate their emotions and feelings in difficult situations, while serving as a positive influence for others.



# What Worked

01

## Staff and Students Opted In

Both groups “voted with their feet” and chose not only to participate in the sessions, but also to consistently return to future sessions. Plus, participants were active and engaged with the breathwork.

02

## Sustainable Model

The curriculum is designed so that teachers and students can continue to train new staff and students and use the lessons in their everyday life outside of school. Students received a consistent multi-session set of tools and programs.

“We’re creating an environment to reduce violence in schools, as well. So many students have things happening in schools and many violence prevention initiatives are outside of school. We want to **change how students respond to each other and give them tools to succeed.**”

- Clintel Hasan, Milwaukee Succeeds



# What Could Be Improved

## Building Relationships



School staff suggested having students meet the SKY Schools instructors prior to any trainings so they could hear about the program from non-teaching staff. Plus, program staff admitted that it was difficult to get the curriculum started in schools, as they first needed to establish relationships with school staff.

## Overall Grant Process Timing



While the responsiveness to violence in our community is greatly appreciated, the timing of the grant process (mid to late summer) and the quick turnaround required for the grant application made it difficult for some organizations to even consider applying.

“**Breathing is freeing.** We talk about stress, but we don’t talk about the impact that stress has on us. I can now catch myself before I reach a point where I need to turn back. I see students take a breath before reaching.”

- Serina Jamison, Pathways High

# Partners



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