



## Data Mining Mindfulness

Mindfulness programs such as Inner Explorer can generate profits for Big Education corporations by potentially collecting and selling private student and family data.

### Mindfulness Programs Explained

Big Education programs have become an integrated part of K-12 public education, promising improved student achievement, discipline, and well-being. Mindfulness programs have specifically emerged, targeting students' mental health. These programs are often implemented as apps on a student's school computer and can be done as a teacher-led classroom exercise or by the individual student. Many of these programs come with recommendations and partnerships through major nonprofit organizations such as BrainFutures, which is "dedicated to improving human outcomes by assessing and advancing the practical applications of new scientific understanding of the brain."<sup>1</sup> Other major organizations promoting the use of mindfulness programs in K-12 education include the GreenLight Fund, MindUP: The Goldie Hawn Foundation, and the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

One example of a K-12 mindfulness program is the InnerExplorer app, which consists of "daily mindfulness programs [which] integrate seamlessly into classrooms," providing 5-10 minute meditations that students conduct during class time.<sup>2</sup> It is used in over 120 school districts in all 50 states, impacting over 2 million students and delivering over 2 billion "mindful minutes" to classrooms. *Id.* It also provides lessons for individual teachers and even families.<sup>3</sup>

Another program used in K-12 schools is MindUP, which "provides a curriculum at the intersection of neuroscience, positive psychology, mindful awareness, and SEL."<sup>4</sup> This curriculum, created in partnership with Scholastic, Inc., offers individual classroom visits and assessments from the program consultants and even a family training session as part of its outreach to "the extended school community." *Id.* Progress in mindfulness skills is measured

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<sup>1</sup> *About BrainFutures*, BRAINFUTURES (2025), <https://www.brainfutures.org/about/>

<sup>2</sup> *Calm Minds Work Better*, INNER EXPLORER INSTITUTE (2025), <https://www.innerexplorerinstitute.org/>

<sup>3</sup> *Inner Explorer*, BRAINFUTURES (2025), <https://www.brainfutures.org/inner-explorer/>

<sup>4</sup> *MindUp*, BRAINFUTURES (2025), <https://www.brainfutures.org/mind-up-2/>

using “an official MindUP pre- and post-evaluation toolkit to assess student outcomes, student/teacher satisfaction, and measure student/teacher social competencies.” *Id.*

Perhaps the most advanced of the programs is MindLift, which “combine[s] Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Self-Affirmation Theory, and AI technology” to provide personalized mental health interventions, noting that “[o]ur AI adapts to your unique needs and circumstances” to provide “inclusive support.”<sup>5</sup> In the K-12 setting, the program provides “a student-specific AI-powered mental health assessment and intervention platform.”<sup>6</sup> This platform provides an AI-driven chatbot which is used to assess student mental health by “create[ing] a real-time, multimodal system that can assess mental health through the use of behavioral pattern tracking, audio tone analysis, facial expression recognition, and text sentiment interpretation.” *Id.*

While these are only three of the many mindfulness programs currently used in K-12 education, all mindfulness programs share the same marketing strategy: they come equipped with expert recommendations and numerous studies, making them seem like the answer to the growing mental health crisis facing many students today.

### **The Big Education Industry**

Mindfulness apps are only one part of the Big Education industry. In 2022, data from the United States shows that over \$750 billion was spent on public elementary and secondary education.<sup>7</sup> The global education technology and smart classroom market currently stands at \$214 billion and is expected to grow to \$445 billion by 2029.<sup>8</sup> These companies thrive by promising solutions to the steadily declining test scores of K-12 education, using persuasive marketing terms such as “evidence-based,” “data-driven,” and “innovation.” Despite the influx of these Big Education solutions, test scores have steadily declined in the United States over the past decade, leading to the question of whether K-12 mindfulness programs are just another profit-driven education technology product with no lasting results in store.<sup>9</sup>

### **Mindfulness Programs and Data Mining**

While mindfulness programs may seem like nothing more than an app with suggested classroom activities, parents must keep in mind that these programs collect and store student data in some capacity – even when the company contracts are carefully worded to seem otherwise.

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<sup>5</sup> *About MindLift — Shift Mindset Daily*, MINDLIFT (2025), <https://mindliftapp.app/about>

<sup>6</sup> Shanky Goyal et al., *MindLift: AI-Powered Mental Health Assessment for Students*, 5 NEUROSCIENCE INFOMATICS (Jun. 2025), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772528625000238>.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Q. Cornman et al., *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 2021–22 (Fiscal Year 2022)*, INST. OF EDUC. SCIS. 3 (2024), <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024301.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *EdTech And Smart Classrooms Global Market Report 2025*, THE BUS. RSCH. CO. (Jan. 2025), <https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/edtech-and-smart-classrooms-global-market-report>.

<sup>9</sup> *Explore NAEP Long-Term Trends in Reading and Mathematics*, THE NATION’S REPORT CARD (2025), <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/lt/?age=9>.

For example, the InnerExplorer privacy policy states that they “do not collect or process information from students or children.” Yet the policy also states that “We permit educational personnel, including teachers and administrators, to register and input class-related information directly into our product through integrations with Learning Management Systems and Single Sign-On provider accounts that the educational institution has enabled.” *Id.* One example of a provider such as this is Clever, a K-12 education rostering tool which states that its “secure integration with your SIS automatically shares student data with applications in real time. School administrators save time with easy implementation, reduce data errors, and strengthen data security for all.”<sup>10</sup> The company also states that the “Inner Explorer SYNC app is integrated with CLEVER which allows for automatic account set up so teachers can simply launch the app and practice.”<sup>11</sup> While the InnerExplorer program may not collect data *from* students in accordance with its privacy policy, does this mean that it does not collect data *about* students that is integrated or synced from a school’s student rostering service – which includes a student’s entire data profile? When a student’s progress is saved in the mindfulness program app, does this data become synced with their student data profile?

The InnerExplorer privacy policy further notes that “[a]s part of providing our services, we may share data with third-party vendors who process information to assist us in delivering our services,” providing two examples of Amazon Web Services and Google Cloud.<sup>12</sup> If the previous questions are answered in the affirmative, this would mean that student data is shared quite freely and broadly.

For the InnerExplorer program, data collected and shared may be as simple as how often a student or family member completes the mindfulness video exercises. For the MindUP program, however, the data collected and synced to the student’s profile would include answers to their mental health survey questions, creating a record that arguably blurs the line between student records and health records. And while MindUP program data may blur the line, the data provided by the AI-driven chatbots and collection devices of the MindLift program would certainly cross it.

While K-12 education programs cite adherence to privacy policies and federal laws, parents must understand that these laws have had major exceptions carved out for education technology companies. For example, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) has been substantially weakened by allowing student data to be shared with third party “school officials,” to include education companies and vendors performing contracted educational functions.<sup>13</sup> Through creative wording, these companies are able to technically comply with their

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<sup>10</sup> *Simplify Access Control and Data Management*, CLEVER (2025), <https://www.clever.com/solutions/data-and-access>

<sup>11</sup> *Inner Explorer (with SYNC)*, CLEVER (2025), <https://www.clever.com/app-gallery/inner-explorer-sync>

<sup>12</sup> *Inner Explorer Privacy Policy*, INNER EXPLORER (2025), <https://innerexplorer.com/privacy>

<sup>13</sup> *Who is a “School Official” under FERPA?*, PROTECTING STUDENT PRIVACY: U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (2025), <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/faq/who-school-official-under-ferpa>

privacy policies and federal laws, even as most parents are left unaware that their child's data is being collected and sold as part of the education company's profit model.<sup>14</sup>

### **What Parents Must Do**

Parents must begin to question the risks associated with their children using mindfulness programs in school, despite their widespread implementation. Children facing stress, anxiety, and other mental health concerns should be directed to their parents for help – not taught that it is something to be handled with classroom breathing exercises or a personalized AI-driven chatbot collecting and logging their mental health data points. Christian parents in particular should take pause to question why mindfulness meditation – a Hindu form of prayer – is being taught to their children and practiced daily during class time as part of the school curriculum.

At the very least, parents should question what mindfulness programs their child is using at school and whether or not the program is connected in any way to their child's school data profile. Parents should request a copy of the program company's privacy policies and any contracts signed with their child's school or district. Parents should also request a list of all third-party companies or vendors which have been provided with any of their child's data, as well as what data was provided. Finally, parents should submit opt-out forms and notify the school that their child will not participate in mindfulness meditation programs. In doing these things, parents will be taking the first steps to regain control of their child's data and protect their children from becoming profit points for Big Education companies.

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<sup>14</sup> Alyson Klein, *Most Tech Companies Profit Off Student Data, Even If They Say Otherwise, Report Finds*, EDWEEK (Jul. 18, 2023), <https://www.edweek.org/technology/most-tech-companies-profit-off-student-data-even-if-they-say-otherwise-report-finds/2023/07>.