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Yoga finds its way into South Berwick school day

By **DEREK CUNNINGHAM**
Democrat Staff Writer

SOUTH BERWICK, Maine — Principal Vicki Stewart is looking to add a new element to the usual morning announcements at Central School — yoga poses.

Teachers from Central School recently spent a day in workout clothes down at the Spring Hill Lodge for a training session in Yoga Ed, a program involving breathing exercises, games and yoga poses which aims to help children concentrate and stay focused throughout the day.

"This is a dream come true," Stewart said. A yoga enthusiast, she often used yoga techniques with her students when she taught second grade. It allowed her students to refocus, she said, and it provided a feeling of success because no matter how the students do the activities, they are done right.

She felt it empowers children and also gives them tools they can carry through life, such as breathing when they are angry and refocusing after a challenge.

The school will be holding yoga classes for teachers once a week and she is looking to integrate some the techniques into the classrooms during the day. One idea she had was to announce different yoga poses for students at the beginning of each day.

Lisa Flynn, of ChildLight Yoga, coached the teachers for several hours Wednesday during a workshop at Spring Hill Lodge.



Rachel Martin, front, performs a stretching exercise with South Berwick Central School teachers during a workshop at Spring Hill Lodge in South Berwick by ChildLight Yoga teaching "Tools for Teachers," a program designed to provide educators with yoga tools for use in the classroom. Rachel will be teaching a Yoga class at the Central School. John Huff/Staff photographer

Flynn guided the teachers through stretches and poses on towels laid out across the floor. She had the teachers pair off and do games like standing back to back and rocking back and forth to music. She also led them through breathing exercises and visualizations as



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**John Huff/Staff photographer
Lisa Flynn of ChildLight Yoga
lists four yoga tools educators
can use in the classroom during
a Yoga Ed. "Tools for Teachers"
workshop for South Berwick
Central School teachers at
Spring Hill Lodge in South
Berwick.**

Stewart felt the Yoga Ed techniques would tie in with the school's efforts in literacy, wellness and anti-bullying. For literacy, the school uses similar visualization techniques to help the youngsters picture the story. The games were perfect, she said, as they encouraged students to say nice things to one another and think of other ways to handle situations.

Sue Sullivan, a pre-kindergarten teacher, definitely planned to use some of the techniques in her classroom a few times during the day, she said. The techniques are helpful for the imagination, she said, "and pre-K kids love to move."

"I'm excited about it," she added.

they sat at tables.

She showed teachers techniques to center themselves and a variety of stretches they could do from a chair, which she said they could use with children before tests. She also showed them ways to focus on positive outcomes and feelings.

The Yoga Ed movement began in Los Angeles, Flynn said, and offers a kindergarten through eighth-grade yoga curriculum and helps give teachers tools to use in classrooms. Teachers are provided with a manual and techniques involving breathing, games, poses, quiet time activities, music and visualizations which can be used in the morning, during transitional periods in the day, before tests and at the end of the day.

Flynn said the tools aim to help the children feel better, learn better and concentrate better. For example, she said, some of the techniques can be used to give students a quiet moment when they come in from recess.