

2011

Evaluation of the South Burlington
**Wellness and
Resilience Program**
Year Three



“Mindfulness is the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”

-Jon Kabat-Zinn (*Professor of Medicine Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he was founding executive director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, and founder and former director of its world-renowned Stress Reduction Clinic.*)

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The detrimental effects of work related stress on the well being and effectiveness of Educators has garnered substantial attention in educational research. Among the efforts to combat Teacher stress and burnout, the use of physiological and psychological contemplative techniques, also known as “Mindfulness,” has attracted growing interest for its potential application in promoting Teacher well-being (Simon et al., 2009). For a third consecutive year, the Wellness and Resilience Program (WRP) was conducted in the South Burlington School District. The mission of WRP sought to improve Educators’ abilities to cope with their demanding jobs through the utilization of contemplative practices in both their personal and professional lives. The content of the ten-month WRP program included a series of monthly group meetings, a fall one-day and spring weekend retreat, weekly yoga classes, meditation and deep breathing training, as well as training and support in the use of additional contemplative and stress-reduction practices. A total of 61 teachers/staff from five South Burlington public schools participated during the 2009/2010 school year. Reduction of stress reports from staff, improvement in “personal health promotion,” and mindful attention awareness were reflected in the changes in pre to post-test scoring for the recorded measures: the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Mindfulness Application Survey (MASQ), and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) respectively. The findings of the evaluation corroborate pre-program hypotheses predicting data trends supporting the benefit of Wellness and Resilience Program training and practice for Educators.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

The beneficial effects of Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices are reflected in a steadily growing body of clinical and educational research. Documented research trends have illuminated the utility of mindfulness techniques in promoting a wide range of improvements to emotional and experiential well-being. A recent meta-analytic review found that mindfulness based interventions have solidly documented associations with a wide range of indices of psychological health (Hoffman et. al, 2010). Among the demonstrated gains associated with mindfulness practice include studies linking mindfulness-based programs with decreased anxiety, improved sleep and physical health, enhanced behavioral self-control, promotion of auto-immune systems, increased neuro-cognitive responsiveness, and heightened empathic awareness (Flasman & Flook, 2009). As the body of evidence supporting the efficacy of Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices has expanded, so has the interest in these practices from mainstream school systems and Educators. An increasing cluster of investigators has begun examining the application of mindfulness practices in educational settings. Although there is clearly established research demonstrating the role of mindfulness in promotion of well-being for adults, there is a relatively limited number of evaluative studies specifically documenting the association of mindfulness and well-being for educators.

Educator Stress, Burnout and Mindfulness

The deleterious effects of professional stress on the well-being of Teachers are thoroughly documented in educational research. Among studies in Industrial/Organizational Psychology, teaching is increasingly ranked among the highest stress inducing professions (Kyriacou, 2001). As many as one quarter of teachers consider their profession to be a “highly stressful” occupation (Klassen & Chui, 2010). Demands from administrators, students, and parents compounded by work overload, student misbehavior, conflict with colleagues, and a perceived lack of recognition for accomplishments all produce risk for disruption to an educator’s emotional and professional well-being. Teachers experiencing high stress levels have lower self-efficacy, poorer teacher-pupil rapport, lower effectiveness ratings, and higher rates of burnout related turnover

(Klassen & Chui, 2010).

An important mitigating factor in the experience of teacher stress is access to formalized professional support systems within his or her education settings. Lui & Ramsey (2008) found that supportive work environments had the strongest influence of teachers’ job satisfaction and perception of occupational “manageability”. Wellness programs for school staff are essential components in creating environments where Educators can feel self-efficacy. Gray (2011) points out that in particular, providing non-threatening, secular opportunities for staff to learn and practice mind-body approaches can go a long way toward nurturing peace in the classroom and school. The simple logic being that, when teachers feel cared for, they are better able to care for their students. Mindfulness approaches, embedded in educator professional development provide a means for regularly reminding school staff of their own ability to self-regulate. In this way it is empowering and nurtures in them a belief in their personal capacity for self-awareness and control (Gray, 2011).

Benefits of Mindfulness Practice for Teachers

Despite the aforementioned paucity of studies targeting specific associations between mindfulness and educator well being, a few examinations have begun to establish some evidence pointing to the existence of a positive correlation relationship. A model for developing social and emotional competence was evaluated by Penn State researchers in 2009. The model included an emphasis on teacher participation in stress reduction and mindfulness development programs. Jennings and Green (2009) proposed that increased involvement in contemplative practices served as a buffer for teachers against burnout and associated job stress. The authors went on to suggest further reaching benefits might have been gained by development of teacher social and emotional competence including improved classroom climate, enhanced teacher-student relationships, effective classroom management, and enhanced academic outcomes.

Watts (2009) sought to examine the relationship of mindfulness skills to self-perceptions of teacher empowerment. Over 1,100 teachers from 23 schools were surveyed for knowledge of mindful awareness and empowerment

indicators of professional growth, self-efficacy, impact, and autonomy. Results indicated that higher levels of mindfulness competence correlated with overall teacher perception of empowerment. The practical application of the study relates to the consideration of empowerment as a preventative factor for teaching related stress.

Similar benefits have been demonstrated in studies utilizing qualitative evaluation methodology. Napoli (2007) examined the impact of Mindfulness Training for public school teachers in Arizona. Teachers from three elementary schools were provided a curriculum of breathing-work, body scanning, movement and balance training, and additional sensory-motor activities. Qualitative coding procedures were utilized to evaluate teacher integration of mindfulness skills into personal and professional practices. Themes revealed in the evaluation indicated that participants perceived a benefit from the Mindfulness training in:

- (1) developing and implementing classroom curriculum
- (2) reduced conflict and anxiety
- (3) improved enjoyment of personal relationships
- (4) overall positive changes in the classroom environment.

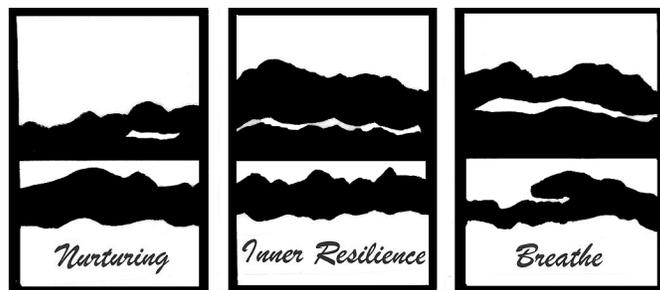
Associated Impact on Students

The damaging impact of educator related stress is not limited to only teachers and staff themselves. Quintiliani (2011) points out that when teachers and administrators suffer from stress at work, they are less able to attend to, concentrate on, and support the psychosocial development of their students. There is great likelihood that when a teacher is struggling with vocational or personal strain, his or her students may absorb collateral damage to their educational experience. The application of mindfulness practices stand to serve as both a preventative and restorative “buffer” for the direct and indirect effects of educator stress. Through the normative use of secular, mindfulness-based, emotional self-regulation practices, many of the problems (associated with educator stress) can tangibly improve (Quintiliani, 2011).

The Inner Resilience Program - Nurturing the Inner Life of Teachers and Students

In the spring of 2002, the Inner Resilience Program (IRP) was founded by Linda Lantieri in response to the effects of September 11, 2001 on children, teachers, parents and administrators in the schools in and around Lower Manhattan that were evacuated that day. IRP's goals then, as now, are to nurture the inner lives of teachers and students by offering the adults in children's lives the self-care tools they need to be present with the students and balance themselves emotionally. IRP soon added an additional component to its efforts which includes a k-8 curriculum for children – “Building Resilience From the Inside Out” based on the book Building Emotional Intelligence (Lantieri, Sounds True, 2008).

The Inner Resilience Program is becoming more recognized as "a value added" to schools and school districts that are going to scale with efforts in social and emotional learning. Besides expanding to several other schools in NYC, IRP is being piloted in Youngstown and Warren School Districts in Ohio and in a cluster of schools in Madrid, Spain. IRP has involved 6,000 educators, 3,000 parents, and 12,000 students thus far (Lantieri, 2011).*



* Metis Associates used a randomized control design to examine the impact of Inner Resilience Program on the well-being of students and teachers as well as the climate of their classrooms on program participants in NYC. There were statistically significant results with regard to teacher wellness, including reduced stress levels (as measured by one scale), increased levels of attention and mindfulness, and greater perceived relational trust among treatment teachers. Additionally, 3rd-grade students of treatment teachers perceived that they had significantly more autonomy and influence in their classes at the end of the school year than at the beginning, and analyses of student wellness indicated that the program had a significant, positive impact on reducing 3rd- and 4th-grade students' frustration levels.

The Wellness and Resilience Program (WRP)

The South Burlington Wellness and Resilience Program (WRP) is a ten-month comprehensive training series designed from core values established within the Inner Resilience Model including the k-8 curriculum, staff development, self-care retreats, and a series of self-care workshops. The mission of WRP has been to improve educators' abilities to cope with their demanding jobs through the utilization of mindfulness-based practices in both their personal and professional lives. WRP provided school staff with a variety of opportunities for the development of self-care and stress reduction skills. Components of WRP were offered across the school year and included a range of intensities from full two-day retreats to optional weekly classes in contemplative practices such as yoga., WRP was coordinated to support existing affective education curricula including programs like *The Responsive Classroom*, while at the same time, not increasing demands on teachers.

Sample and Recruitment

The South Burlington School District is a public school system serving a community of around 17,000 citizens. An introductory training in Mindfulness Practice was offered for all educators in the South Burlington District in the spring of 2009. At the end of the training, an invitation was extended to any interested district staff for inclusion in the ten-month Wellness and Resilience Program (WRP). Seventy-one educators from five schools volunteered. The schools included three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Of the 71, the vast majority were classroom teachers. However, participants included guidance counselors, para-educators, reading specialists, building and district administrators and a school nurse. All but four were female. Most participants were long term educators with average tenure approaching 20 years in the field. Twenty-one of the educators completing the WRP were considered "veteran" participants. These teachers and staff members had previously completed a similar incarnation of the WRP during the previous school year.

Attrition

Over the course of the ten-month WRP, a few participants were not able to complete all aspects of the program. A small number of these educators withdrew voluntarily from participation. To preserve integrity of the program evaluation, a few additional participants were allowed to engage in WRP activities, but were not included during the final evaluation analysis due to gaps in program attendance. Ultimately, 61 of the initial 71 educators recruited for WRP followed the program to completion and participated in all aspects of data collection.

Components of WRP

Fall Self-Care Retreat

A one (vet group) or two-day (new group) retreat held in October of the school year provides the cornerstone of key mindfulness fundamentals comprised in the Wellness and Resilience Program.

The Retreat centered on three core learning objectives including:

- (1) Discovery of the factors that contribute to educator stress and related impact on health and well being.
- (2) Training in relaxation techniques and self-care tools for daily life.
- (3) Reconnection with passion for education.

Monthly Training in Mindfulness Skills

This training series is focused on self-regulation of attention and the integration of mindfulness orientation into personal and professional development. The 90 minute sessions were led by Clinical Health Psychologist, Anthony Quintiliani and Health Educator, Sonia Cassani.

Mindfulness Practice

Another program element is mindfulness coaching with a highly trained mindfulness teacher and colleague of Shinzen Young, Teal Scott. Teal led mindfulness training series in classrooms and after school with staff at the elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the year, providing a live instructional model for teachers. This opportunity was open to any interested district staff.

Day and a Half Spring Retreat

Designed in coordination with the Fall Retreat, this training again is focused on restorative activities for educators. The curriculum for the retreat was designed to encourage reflection around personal development of mindfulness skills.

Optional Weekly Opportunities in Mind-Body Practices

Educators involved with WRP were offered access to a wide range of weekly classes in mind-body practices. Each class was instructed by a certified professional for the respective subject. Offerings included four weeks each of yoga, restorative yoga, mindfulness, introduction to meditation, Tai Chi, and Qigong. Participation in classes was voluntary. To improve access to classes for teachers, instruction location was rotated among participating schools.

Classroom/School Integration

The degree of classroom program implementation varied according to teacher comfort level with the stress-reduction practices, which included basic exercises in relaxing the body and focusing the mind. The emphasis for first-year participants was on teacher self-care and personal familiarity with application of the contemplative practices so that participants became ready to comfortably model these practices in the classroom. Many teachers took some time each day with their students for quiet relaxation and reflection. For some it was a designated part of their routine, and for others such 'mind-body' activities, including deep breathing and stretching, were briefly interspersed during transition times throughout the day. Additionally, many teachers created "peace corners" in their classrooms where students were allowed to go for periods of time to calm themselves as needed.

Community Connection

Recognizing that the sustainability of WRP practices depend largely on the support of families and community, a community outreach component was offered to engage parents and community members and improve familiarity with key mindfulness concepts. The parent/community book group met monthly to discuss Linda Lantieri's *Building Inner Resilience* and, with the guidance of one of its professionally trained members, integrated reflective

practices into these meetings. This past school year, the monthly parent/guardian/community member group was led by mindfulness instructor Kim Nolan, M.Ed., who offered the group skills to regulate emotions, reduce stress, and nurture their inner lives. This group was made available to South Burlington residents as well as to residents in neighboring communities; all sessions were free. Time was offered for dialogue on how participants might offer these approaches in their homes and to the young people in their lives.

Evaluation Methodology

This study utilized a quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of the Wellness and Resilience Program on the stress, well-being, and mindfulness practices of teachers and related student support faculty.

Evaluation of WRP program effectiveness examined three separate questions:

- (1) Did Teachers/Staff who participated in the program perceive less experience of generalized stress in their lives upon completion of the program?
- (2) Did the program have greater effect on teachers/staff reporting a greater integration of mindfulness practice into daily life and greater correlated self-reports of happiness and calm?
- (1) Would participation in WRP result in the development of a core characteristic of dispositional mindfulness: open or receptive awareness of and attention to what is taking place in the present?

A mixed-methodology evaluation protocol was utilized to assess the impact of WRP on participants. That is to say, both quantitative and qualitative modalities of data collection were employed. Quantitative data was derived from numeric reflections of participant characteristics of stress, mindfulness, and well-being yielded by scaled scores from standardized measures administered by program leaders. Teachers and staff completed a battery of three core measures on mindfulness and stress experience in the fall and again in the spring of the 2009–2010 school year. Statistical analyses examined differential effects on these measures for participants, pre and post-program.

Qualitative data involved the collection of subjective feelings and opinions around the procedure and impact of WRP on participants themselves. First-person perspectives for all participants were collected using confidential post-

participation satisfaction surveys. Survey questions included directed inquiries on participant experience and perceptions. Opportunities were provided for open ended responses to allow participants to expound upon their personal perspective on any area of WRP. Survey responses were tabulated and personal narratives were coded and examined for themes and trends.

Measures

The Mindfulness Applications Survey (MASQ) provides a reflection of participant perception of their use of mindfulness skills and related indices of general well being including reports of work satisfaction, happiness levels, capacity for calmness, and understanding of themselves and others (Quintiliani, 2010). Ratings from participants on related experience and function are aggregate on The MASQ to produce an "Overall Health Promotion Score" (OHP). Higher Scores of "Overall Health Promotion" indicate larger integration of mindfulness practice into daily life and greater correlated self-reports of happiness and calm. The survey was developed by psychologist and Professor Anthony Quintiliani. Dr. Quintiliani has extensive clinical experience integrating mindfulness practice for therapeutic benefit. Although not traditionally normed through scientific protocol, the MASQ has demonstrated considerable anecdotal correlation to participant perception of personal calm, well-being, and application of mindfulness skill.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress (Cohen et al., 2008). This survey summates direct queries about how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. The higher the aggregate scores produced by the PSS, the higher the participant appraisal of their own general stress levels. The PSS has demonstrated high levels of construct validity, including documented correlation to related stress and health behavior measures (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), also known as the Day to Day Experiences Scale, assesses participant success utilizing mindful awareness and its relation to self-regulation and improved well being. (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The 15-item scale asks participants to rate themselves

both on global experiences of mindfulness, but also on day to day actions, attention, thoughts and interpersonal communication. Higher scores on the scale provided by the MAAS indicates greater participant success utilizing mindful awareness and its relation to self-regulation and improved well-being. The MAAS has been established as having a strong internal consistency across a wide range of samples (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Findings - Quantitative

Mindfulness Application Survey (MASQ)

Sixty-one participants completed the MASQ prior to beginning the program in September of 2009 and then a second time after program completion in June of 2010. The mean scores for participant OHP were 38.03 in September and 49.03 in June. Paired-samples t-tests were calculated to compare OHP mean scores from September 2009 (pretest) to mean scores from June 2010 (post-test). The changes in mean score were statistically significant ($t = -8.05$, $sig. = .000$, $\alpha = .05$). The effect size of this change was large at .54. These findings seem to indicate a notable increase in the application of mindfulness skills and related improvements to well being for participants in the WR Program.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Participants were likewise administered the PSS in both September of 2009 and then again in June of 2010. The mean scores for participant OHP were 20.08 in September and 13.21 in June, indicating perceptions of stress decreased over time for participants. Paired-samples t-tests were calculated to compare mean scores of participant general stress level from September 2009 (pretest) to mean scores from June 2010 (posttest). Again, the changes in mean score were statistically significant ($t = 7.97$, $sig. = .000$, $\alpha = .05$). The effect size of this change was large at .64. The reduction of PSS mean scores seems to reflect that participants in the IR program appraised a marked decrease in their current levels of experienced stress from September to June.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The MAAS was the final standardized measure utilized in the evaluation. Participants also completed this survey prior to beginning WRP and then again following program completion. The mean scores for participant MAAS were 52.95 in September and 65.9 in June. Paired-samples t-tests were calculated to compare mean scores from September 2009 (pretest) to mean scores from June 2010 (post-test). The changes in mean score were statistically significant ($t = -7.98$, $sig. = .000$, $\alpha = .05$). The effect size of this change was large at .514. The increase of MAAS mean scores suggests a substantial increase in the application of Mindful attention and awareness and related improvements to well-being for participants in the IR Program.

Table 1
Teacher Wellness Qualities Measured and Results

Wellness Quality Measured	Scale	Pre Program Measure	Post Program Measure	Test of Significance for Interaction (<i>within subjects</i>)	Test of Meaningfulness for Interaction (<i>Effect Size</i>)
Stress	PPSQ	Mean= 20.08 S.D.= 6.08	Mean= 13.22 S.D.= 5.75	$T = -8.05$ $P < .05$	0.54
Mindfulness	MASQ	Mean= 38.03 S.D.= 8.5	Mean= 49.03 S.D.= 8.8	$T = -7.98$ $P < .05$	0.514
Mindful Attention Awareness	MAAS	Mean= 52.95 S.D.= 11.4	Mean= 65.9 S.D.= 10.1	$T = 7.97$ $P < .05$	0.64

* indicates $p < .05$ based on results of t-tests

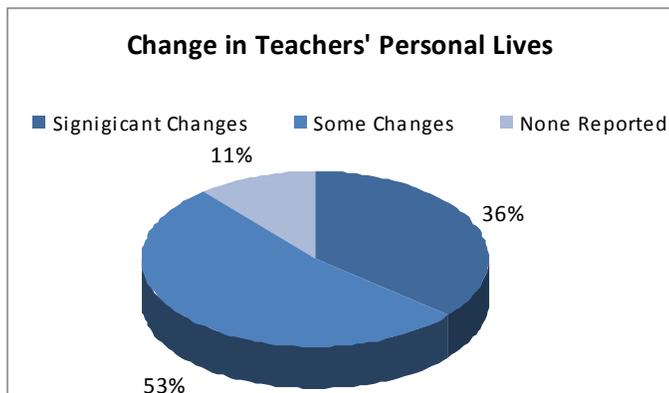
The Findings indicated several interesting and statistically significant results with regard to teacher wellness, including reduced stress levels (as measured by one scale) and increased application of mindfulness skills. Reduction of stress reports from staff, improvement in “personal health promotion” and mindful attention awareness were reflected in the changes in pre to post-test scoring for the recorded measures PPSQ, MASQ, and DDS respectively. The changes in mean score for all measures between pre and post program were statistically significant (see Table 1). That is to say, it can be reasonably inferred that the reflected changes in participant stress experience, overall mindfulness health promotion and mindful awareness is resultant from participation in the Wellness and Resilience Program and not from chance or other related time or maturational effects.

Findings - Qualitative

A critical focus in evaluation research is derived from soliciting the first hand experiential accounts of those key individuals directly involved with the interactions associated with the program (Patton, 2002). First-person perspectives on the experience of the WRP Program were collected for all 61 participants using confidential satisfaction surveys. Educator responses were summated and analyzed for themes and relevant trends. Qualitative analyses revealed participants in general perceived tangible benefit for WRP in both their personal and professional lives. Common thematic trends in narrative accounts from educators included gains in staying in the moment, increased patience with students, physical calming achieved from deep breathing, and overall improvements to classroom stress levels.

WRP Effect on Educators' Personal Lives

Educators were queried to indicate any tangible impact of program participation on their personal lives. A strong majority of participants described positive benefits from WRP with 89% reporting feeling the program had made noticeable or significant positive changes to their professional lives. Only 11% of participants were undecided or did not report feeling any change.



Educators were offered the opportunity to provide narrative accounts of WRP benefits on their personal well-being.

A sampling of typical responses is reflected below:

"The focus on being "in the present" was new. I realized that much of my life has just passed without me being "there."

"It was easier to achieve a feeling of peaceful strength when needed."

"Rather than being overwhelmed by all I needed to do, I was able to address each thing, one at a time, and let the thoughts about the rest of the things on my list go until it was time to address them."

"I developed renewed interest and investment in self-care."

"I have been able to deal with very stressful personal situations this year in a calm and mindful way."

"My ability to meditate has greatly improved and it's often the first strategy I use when I feel stressed."

"It's easier for me to let things go and focus on what is truly important."

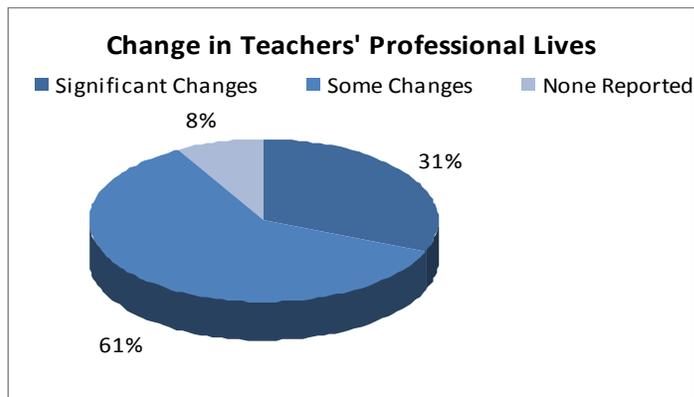
"I'm meditating, doing yoga, reading, and learning more and more every day and generally being kinder to myself and others."

"I increased my ability to find and maintain calm; my whole family noticed, especially my kids."

"I used the relaxation strategies to sleep!"

WRP Effect on Educators' Professional Lives

Educators were also asked to rate any tangible impact of program participation on their professional lives. An even stronger majority of participants noted positive benefit from WRP with 92% reporting feeling the program had made noticeable or significant positive changes to their professional lives. Only 8% of participants were undecided or did not report feeling any change.



Educators were encouraged to provide descriptive examples of WRP benefits in their professional experience.

A sampling of typical responses is reflected below:

"The biggest change I noticed was that students with a propensity for escalating seemed to improve their ability to calm themselves.....and stay calm."

"I recognize when I need a break and use mindfulness at those times. I also started using it with my students which helped them with their work completion in teaching executive functioning skills."

"I find the practices becoming more a part of how I interact with others, including my students."

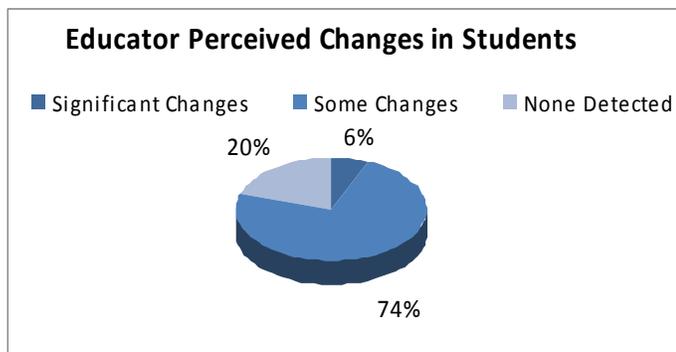
"My classroom management has improved."

"I became a better listener to students and colleagues."

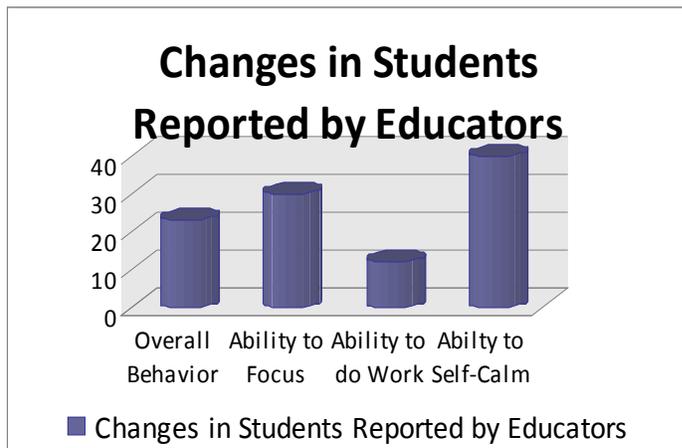
"I was better able to enjoy my students."

Perceived Impact on the Students of WRP Participants

The WRP Program is presumed to have both direct and indirect impact on the professional experiences of participants. One such indirect impact is any correlated benefit to students that may occur as the participant educator grows in his or her utilization of mindfulness skills. As part of the program, participants were encouraged to integrate the application of mindfulness skills and strategies into their classroom work with students using a variety of suggested tools and developmentally appropriate resources. Participants were queried to indicate whether any associated benefit of program participation was reflected in the form of changes to the students they served in school. A strong majority of participants described perceived changes to students that occurred during the Educator participation in WRP. Eighty percent of participants reported feeling there were noticeable or significant positive changes to their students after completing the WRP.



For participants that indicated perceiving positive changes in their students, educators were asked to further specificity in the type of change they had witnessed. Participants were offered four choices- Overall Behavior, Ability to Focus, Ability to Complete Tasks, and Ability to Self-Calm. Participants were instructed to circle as many as applied. Educators indicated a range of perceived benefits; however, the Ability to Self Calm was selected most often by a notable margin.



Participants were encouraged to describe a narrative of examples of the indirect benefit of Educator WRP completion on student behavior in the classroom.

A sample of typical responses is reflected below:

“I work with many students who suffer from anxiety. By closing their eyes, deep breathing, and visualizing, they were better able to face challenges.”

“I had a lot less discipline to manage... less “time-outs” or visits to the “opportunity room.” Also, there were noticeable changes to the mood of students which allowed for greater focus and participation in the classroom.”

“There was an increase in appearance of happiness, focus, and sustained attention.”

“My students asked for IR time and always appeared more relaxed and focused after an activity.”

“Students would remind each other to “just breathe.”

“The afternoon was more productive after relaxation or yoga.”

“We asked for feedback from the class (of sophomores), and 75% said it helped.”

“The results of my 8th grade diagnostics were much higher than last year.”

“Students’ journal writing reflected the benefits of relaxation.”

“Students coached each other using the language and strategies without prompting throughout the day.”

“There were fewer office referrals for students who were frequently referred in the past.”

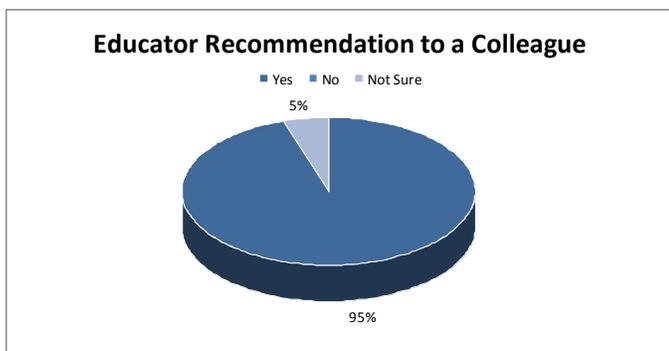
“When I am relaxed and focused, my students are more relaxed and focused.”

“My students used the Peace Place on their own for a reasonable amount of time and came back to the group ready to learn.”

“There was less need for behavior plans and there were fewer peer issues due to decreased impulsive actions.”

Educator Recommendation of WRP

One of the more robust areas of qualitative inquiry is whether or not participants of a program would provide an endorsement for colleagues to complete a future cycle of the program's curriculum. This inquiry is particularly germane for educators who increasingly report feeling over-extended in their professional scheduling. Despite the magnitude of existing requirements for Educators in this study, the overwhelming majority of WRP participants reported they would recommend the program to colleagues. 95% of educators stated they would urge colleagues to participate with only 5% reported feeling they were not sure whether they would or not. No participants stated they would definitively not recommend WRP.



Some Participants offered descriptive evidence on which they would base their recommendation of WRP.

A sample of typical responses is reflected below:

"I connected with colleagues in ways I never thought I would."

"It has deepened my relationships with other colleagues who participated in the program."

"We talked a common language and put stress into perspective."

"The richness of the activities opens us to each other in deeper and more authentic ways."

"We talk about how IR has made a difference for us."

"It was easier to listen to and accept just about everything, a higher tolerance developed."

Discussion

In summary, the evaluation results support the benefit of Wellness and Resilience training and practice for educators across areas of personal and professional functioning. Reduction of stress reports from staff, improvement in "personal health promotion," and mindful attention awareness were reflected in the changes in pre to post-test scoring for the recorded measures PPSQ, MASQ and DDS respectively. The changes in mean score for all measures between pre and post program were statistically significant (see Table 1). That is to say, it can be reasonably inferred that the reflected changes in participant stress experience, overall mindfulness health promotion and mindful awareness is resultant from participation in the Wellness and Resilience Program and not from chance or other related time or maturational effects. These results seem to corroborate data trends supporting the benefits of WRP for educators established during early phases of evaluation (Wilson, 2009). Qualitative themes established during the evaluation reinforce the quantitative findings. First person narratives from educators extolled both personal and professional benefits from WRP participation.

Limitations

The utilization of a quasi-experimental evaluation design was based on logistics and restraints related to program implementation in the real world setting of working educators. The methodology applied contained rigor sufficient to draw confidence with the project findings. However, the absence of a control group limit strength in any conclusions derived from project analysis. Participants were self-selected and may have been predisposed to interest or belief in mindfulness practice. Lack of a neutral comparison group limits the evaluations ability to isolate WRP as a determinate variable associated with changes in participant attitude or behavior.

The timeline of participant assessment implementation may also have factored as a compound. Data was collected at the beginning and end of the calendar school year. These collection points are logical in that they coincide naturally to program and school cycles. However, natural stress and well being may change for educators along this same timeline for reasons inherent to the nature of teaching. That is to say, educators may have a natural tendency to be more stressed at the onset of a school year and more relaxed prior to a pending summer respite.

Future Considerations

Evaluations of the Wellness and Resilience Program have supported its application as a “Promising Practice” in the reduction of stress and promotion of emotional health for educators. For WRP to establish confidence as an “Evidence-Based Model”, future evaluation must include greater scientific rigor with regard to methodological considerations. Most notably, WRP would benefit from the use of a control group for comparing the impact of the program on educator stress and well-being. Opportunities for application of a control in evaluation are numerous. Future evaluations could draw data from a similarly sized pool of school employees from the same district who are not engaging in WRP. This would allow for both within and between group comparisons on the impact of the program on Educators. Should the growing size of WRP participants in this district prohibit access to a matching control sample size, Evaluators could consider recruiting educators from a nearby district. Careful consideration would need to be paid in indentifying corresponding district size and school demographics.

The findings from the current evaluation suggest broad improvements to educator well-being. Future study may seek to provide greater specificity into areas of functional change for participants. Placing the current findings in the context of existing research on mindfulness practices could provide direction for methodological augmentation for WRP evaluation. Potential areas for inquiry include examination of the role of mindfulness in quelling symptoms in adult depression. Recent research has suggested an association with mindfulness and decrease in related depressive symptoms (Hoffman et. al, 2010). The adoption of a standardized assessment measure such as the Beck Depression Inventory administered at pre and post intervention would afford improved clarity on how WRP may elucidate changes in psychological functioning for participants.

Lastly, consideration may be given to prioritizing targeted participants for WRP within schools from staff members considered to be most in need. Educational research has documented the existence of critical and/or vulnerable points in the careers of educators. One group in particular considered “at-risk” for high stress levels are first-year teachers. During the first year of teaching, e`ducators report higher levels of anxiety, stress, inadequacy, and

social isolation than do their veteran counterparts (Sharplin et. al, 2011). Specific examination of the effects of WRP on this group could provide meaningful information on best practices for assisting rookie Teachers acclimate to the classroom

Summary and Recommendation

The purpose of the evaluation was to inform the efficacy of a large scale Wellness and Resilience Program in benefiting educators’ stress reduction and well-being in a public school system. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest robust decreases in stress perception, increases in mindful awareness, and improved reports for personal and professional well-being for participants. Additionally, these findings reinforce trends associated with previous evaluations demonstrating similar benefits (Wilson, 2009). The evaluation suggests evidence supporting the use of mindfulness and contemplative practices utilized in such programs as WRP, as a sustainable resource for minimizing stress on teachers and in turn, related strain on students in public schools.

Criticism of Contemplative Practices in school systems often centers on the supposed time and financial costs associated with such programs. The fear being that mindfulness activities are unproven and take away planning/ preparation time that is so valuable for teachers. With the ever growing pressure for improved standards-based testing scores, some contend that a focus on contemplative practices draws away from other areas of professional development related to curriculum and direct instruction more likely to benefit testing. And when taken into consideration with the strained financial environment that most schools are currently operating in, mindfulness programs are sometimes considered “luxury” expenditures. However, it is worth noting the far reaching range of benefits reported by educator participants in the WRP Program. It seems logical that any program that reduces stress and creates more emotionally competent educators will have a meaningful positive impact on the classroom learning climate, student achievement, workforce morale, and overall school climate. While definitive evidence is not yet available, the evaluation trends established for WRP seem to strongly support steps be taken to ensure the sustainability of the program as well as expansion to surrounding school districts.

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