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Wellness Works for Educators:  
Mindful Practices Affect Teacher Well-Being

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## MINDFUL PRACTICES AFFECT TEACHER WELL-BEING

**Dedication**

I dedicate this project to teachers, to the teachers in this study, to the hundreds of educators I have encountered through the years and to all of the others, who moment to moment are putting their hearts and souls into this meaningful work, in their classrooms.

I would like to truly thank the pioneers in the field of bringing mindful practices to students and teachers in their classrooms, my parents Midge and Rick Kinder, *Wellness Works in Schools* 2001. Enjoy your well-earned retirement, Mom and Dad.

I am also so grateful for the patience and support of: my family Chris, Gralyn and Fen, my colleague Christen Coscia, and my research mentor Dr. Nadine Larkin.

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### **Abstract**

Pressures from standardized testing, all-encompassing teacher evaluations and increasingly complicated needs of students are bolstering teacher turnover and burnout among America's educators. The need is greater than ever to find effective means to support these hard-working teachers. The nervous systems and well-being that teachers bring into their classrooms each day have a profound impact on their ability to reach and teach their students. The researcher-instructor offered a six-week program of mindful practices in four sessions for willing teachers in a suburban elementary school. Evidence of the program's impact was measured by teacher well-being survey (pre and post) as well as written reflection at the end of the six weeks. The study indicated that teachers reported some increases in traits related to well-being like enhanced sleep quality, managing stress, maintaining healthy energy and having self-care routines. These kinds of protective factors could impact their capacities to bring their best selves to this work and to better support their students.

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### **Wellness Works for Educators: Mindful Practices Affect Teacher Well Being**

Teachers play a critical role in establishing a safe classroom culture that leads to student well-being and learning. The very profession is plagued by high stress, burnout, and attrition (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013).

Teachers are among the true culture heroes of our time. Daily they must deal with children who have been damaged by social pathologies that no one else has the will to cure. Daily they are berated by politicians, the public and the press for their alleged inadequacies and failures. And daily they return to their classrooms, opening their hearts and minds in hopes of helping children do the same. (Palmer, 2007, p. vii)

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future gives this report: one-third of all teachers leave after three years and more than 46% leave within their first five years. These numbers have been on the increase within the last three decades (Kopkowski, 2012). Teaching is one of the most taxing professions that one can pursue. The teacher's leadership role in the classroom directly affects student experience, involvement, learning, social-emotional capabilities and well-being. Teacher burnout is reported to have triggered a decades-long rise in turnover rates for schools. (Flook et al., 2013).

Palmer (2007) believes, "There has to be a way to support teachers' resilience and hero-ness" (p. 17). Teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability and courage. And it is that very vulnerability that allows them to be so skillful at creating human connection, while at the same time making them so susceptible to the inherent stresses

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of the job. According to Palmer (2007), connection and job satisfaction are critical influencers relating to teacher performance. He wrote that disconnection actually can become a means (in fact a tool) of self-protection. And satisfaction with our heart-felt work is directly tied to our capacity for human connection. Retaining good teachers and providing them with strategies for managing stress, enhancing well-being and integrating those qualities into the classroom culture is the focus of this study. It would be invaluable to the teaching profession, and the children served by it, to make available to educators a protective approach - one that enables those in this chosen work to be at their best. It would need to be an approach that fits into their professional and personal lives that is teachable, learnable and practicable.

Jennings and Greenberg (2009) examined the effects of professional training incorporating mindfulness with a goal of creating a prosocial classroom. They focused on the teachers' social and emotional competence (SEC) and well-being as directly affecting classroom climate and student experience. Their model explores ways to create a classroom environment that is more conducive to learning and that enhances student outcomes. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) suggested that there is a correlation between SEC, mindfulness and prevention of teacher burnout.

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### **Review of Literature**

Lack of personal engagement and genuine connection, as well as emotional exhaustion, psychological distress, pressure, scrutiny and accountability linked to standardized tests, are causal factors in burnout for teachers (Flook et al., 2013). The MetLife Survey of Teachers reports on self-reported job satisfaction. In 2008, 62% of respondents felt “very satisfied” in their work. By the 2012 survey, 39% reported the same feeling of satisfaction. The 2012 numbers are the lowest recorded in the more than 25-year history of the survey. Stress was another cause of burnout that was measured. In the most recent survey, 51% of teachers reported feeling under great stress for several days a week. This is an increase of 70% from 1985 (Ward, 2015).

Jennings (2015) focused on our tendency to overlook professional stress and personal needs in order to make others’ needs a priority, thus leading to increased stress and disconnection. “As educators our secret weapon is our warm, open heart and our caring presence” (p. 110). To keep our hearts warm and open requires that we care for ourselves first. Teachers who create self-care habits and a means of enhancing inner resources are able to find balance in this heartfelt work. Those who cannot struggle, lose the hope they entered with and eventually exit, at increasingly astounding rates.

### **Teacher Attrition**

The estimated national price tag for the “revolving door” of teacher turnover is \$7 billion a year. The toll of this lack of consistency and re-training, in order to replace classroom leaders, equals roughly one million professionals enduring job transition every year (Kopkowski, 2012). Employee turnover is clearly costly for businesses,

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especially consequential for those settings that depend on extensive interaction between workers (with customers/students too), as well as requiring commitment, continuity and cohesion. High attrition in schools not only impacts employee performance and success but may also harm the school environment and student performance (Ingersoll, 2012). Leaving the classroom has an impact on school environments (Flook et al., 2013), as does staying to endure high-stress situations and increasingly challenging expectations and evaluations. Teacher retention and anti-burnout strategies might be what is needed in order to keep good teachers and help them perform better in the classroom, if they do stay. Burnout can be directly caused by one's perceptions of stress and their ability to cope with demands (McCormick & Barnett, 2011).

On the other hand, there are some who will assert that teacher attrition is a natural and helpful sifting or filtering of a specialized workforce -- a workforce that can become over-run by ineffective educators. These are educators who have simply stayed too long. Therefore the turnover creates a kind of natural selection within school settings, leaving the irreplaceables and dropping the low-performing teachers (Wu, 2012).

### **Providing Support for Those Who Stay**

According to Palmer (2007), teaching is a vocation that requires a doling out of our inner selves. It is the sum of heart, effort and care. True teaching emerges from one's self, however that may be, for better or for worse. Caring for the teacher's inner self becomes critical for endurance of the profession. Most school-based interventions supporting people in schools challenged by stress are student-facing. But there are a few programs implemented to help teachers manage their stress and bolster their well-being.

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Some may creep into pre-service or professional training for teachers. But clearly, more needs to be done to assist teachers in being the healthy leaders and nurturers they intended to be when they stepped into this work. Mindfulness training has emerged across many disciplines as a means to manage, and even reduce stress (Flook et al., 2013).

### **Introducing Mindfulness**

Jon Kabat-Zinn is credited with expanding the accessibility of mindfulness in the United States by starting the Stress Reduction Clinic in the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1980. According to Kabat-Zinn (1990) “Mindfulness is described as paying attention in the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment” (p. 5). With this practice of paying attention, one can be less reactive, more resilient to stress, and notice an improved sense of well-being. Mindfulness training builds attention by naturally enhancing our experience with an object of attention. That object could be the breath, sensations in the body, a specific sound or maybe thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness practice over time can cultivate positive qualities such as empathy, impulse control, emotion regulation and mental flexibility (Flook et al., 2013).

### **Mindful Education Reform**

Ward (2015) suggested an entirely new path of education reform, one that “seeks to support teachers, re-establish their autonomy and rebuild their general trust in institutions (p. 3).” He went on to specify that the key to improving schools is not in the interventionist strategies and think-tank brainstormed ideas but rather in the way

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teachers and schools are supported financially and publicly. *Emotionally* could be added to this list.

In our rush to reform education, we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resources called the teachers, on whom so much depends. (Palmer, 2007, p .4)

### **Mindfulness Training for Teachers**

Botwinik (2007) created a set of habits to help prevent teachers in small districts, often lacking self-care workshops, from becoming overstressed dropouts. Her self-protective factors list included: realistic limit-setting, boundary maintenance (attention moves away from school when driving home), physical fitness, professional conference attendance, professional aim shifting, and a sense of humor. Mindfulness could be found in some of these but most specifically in the active redirection of attention to other aspects of life. This takes practice to achieve, especially since school work and grading routinely follow teachers home.

Frias' (2015) Mindfulness First program aims to lessen the emotional dissonance that is often a by-product of teaching. The program focused on the idea that teaching is a profoundly emotional profession. Teachers are required to repress their true emotions in order to exude joy, hope and levity when they are feeling none of it, instead they are filled with annoyance and anger. That dissonance is the source of stress,

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cynicism and burnout. Frias has recorded the reflections of teachers who took on a practice of mindfulness. These teachers experienced a “shift” in what they were able to bring to the classroom. One teacher reported that in the past, when kids would yell at her, she would become tense, get defensive, and dive into a power struggle. After practicing mindfulness, she noted that when facing a similar situation, she pauses and checks in on herself – for what she is really feeling in the moment and chooses to respond rather than react (Frias, 2015).

Sixty-four middle school educators participated in the Community Approach to Learning Mindfully (CALM) program. For four days each week over 16 weeks, they participated in intervention sessions that included gentle yoga and mindfulness practices. Through a variety of measures (biological and self-report), they found that CALM had significant benefits for educators: positive affect, classroom management, distress tolerance, physical symptoms, blood pressure and cortisol awakening response. There were also effects to measures related to stress and burnout. Educators in the study reflected that it was beneficial as well as feasible (Harris, Jennings, Katz, Deidre, Abenavoli, & Greenberg, 2015). Given the current, stressful climate in public schools, a program that effectively supports teachers and enhances their heart-centered work would likely impact the children in their charge.

In the field of education the natural ebb and flow of changing priorities and the availability of resources to support those priorities is constant, all with a focus on finding a remedy. In the United States there are many sources of ideas and trends from reform, to overhaul, and back to the basics. But all of the efforts and resources can do very little to create change when those on the front lines are leaving or floundering at a

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shocking rate. At the core of education is the teacher and what she/he can bring to the daily work of guiding and supporting students. As human beings, our well-being is foundational to success and thriving and it is well worth study to find ways of enhancing well-being in our teachers.

### **Research Question**

Mindfulness has been found to bolster the inner lives and performances of people living and working in stressful situations - on the front lines of battle (Stanley, 2007). Therefore it shows promise for doing the same for our teachers, on the front lines in schools. With this in mind, the instructor-researcher explored the following research question: Can a six-week mindful practice program of self-care positively affect the well-being of teachers?

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### **Method**

The mindful practices in this study included six weeks of guided and individual practice. Teachers volunteered to participate in this study and attend four group sessions. A written/digital guide with diverse resources was available throughout the project to support participants' in-person/on-going practice. Two measurement tools provided data exploring the effects of mindful practices on teachers' well-being: trends and changes found in pre and post program surveys and post-program, narrative reflections (informed by their practice logs and sleep journals).

### **Participants**

Teachers in a local elementary school were invited to participate by one of their own colleagues who is familiar with mindful practices and received a grant to pay for professional development during 2016. The school enrolls 632 students within a 4,363 total enrollment suburban public school district. The average class size is 20 students and the free / reduced lunch rate is 23% across the district. 190 students are enrolled in ESL programming K-12. Sixteen full-time teachers volunteered to participate in the study. The teachers ranged in age (27 years+), years in the profession (5 years +), grade level (K-6<sup>th</sup>) and disciplines taught (including classroom core, reading support and physical education). All volunteers for this project were women. No ethnicity, SES or more personal data was collected for this study.

The mindful practices instructor /researcher's teaching career spans 26 years in private and public schools, including 11 years bringing mindfulness into special education (autistic & emotional support) and alternative education (including

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incarceration) settings. She creates programming and teaching tools to: address diverse student/educator needs, build relationships, support teachers with self-care (in and out of the classroom), engage participation, and guide classroom behavior. Her work is informed by training with: the *Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Institute*, the *Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute*, and *Eastern Mennonite University* - pursuing a master of education degree (working with at-risk populations), 2016. She holds a Pennsylvania teaching certificate (k-6) and a B.A. Ed. from Alma College, Michigan.

### **Apparatus**

The instructor-researcher created and/or modified the (Wellness Works) tools used to support teachers' mindful practices and measure the program's effects. Wellness Works has been generating and adapting professional support for teachers for more than sixteen years in urban, rural and suburban districts (locally and nationally). There have been many training programs/models created through the years depending on the needs of the teachers involved. The well-being tools grew out of the Classroom Integration Teacher Training (8-12 week) and Teacher Support through Mindful Practices (year-long) models, combined. Because brevity was required for the well-being project, the most relevant pieces were implemented in the six-week program. Results from anecdotal feedback across the 16 years remain positive and at last count 94% of teachers taking Wellness Works Professional Development report wanting more and 90% recommend that others teachers experience it.

Also prior to the initial training session, teachers were given articles and information outlining the field of mindfulness in education and the role it is increasingly playing in schools, for teachers and for students. An outline was shared regarding the

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range of didactic content and experiential practices that would be included in the project.

During the first session teachers read, asked questions, discussed and signed the Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) which outlined expectations for: attendance at group sessions, self-reflecting and recording of practice and observable change. The Consent Form included basic cautions regarding practice, an emphasis on choice (level, intensity and opting out of any practices) being part of the practice and a detailed, yet simple exit procedure.

During the first group session the Pre-program Survey (Appendix C) was completed by all participants, collected by the researcher-instructor and confidentially kept on file as baseline data. The Post-program Survey (identical to the Pre-program Survey - Appendix C) and Final Reflection Form (Appendix D) were completed after the final (4th) group session.

The Wellness Works Survey for Educators (created by the researcher for the project) was entirely self-report, utilizing a 5-point Likert Scale. The 20 well-being indicators were generated based on personal and professional traits, somewhat leaning toward an educator context. The survey refers to school, classroom and students, quite specifically in eight of the traits posed to the participants. Then on a more personal side, the remaining traits relate to energy, rest, humor, health, self-care routines, tendencies and perceived level of stress. The traits are random in their order but are all sway toward well-being. The higher the rating (ranging from 1 to 5) the greater the sense / experience of well-being.

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### **Procedure**

Permission was granted by Eastern Mennonite University's IRB to conduct the study involving human subjects. The principal of the school gave permission for teachers to be trained and for the study to be conducted by signing the Permission to Conduct Action Research Study Letter (Appendix A).

The four group sessions were offered from 7:30-8:30 on Friday mornings during the spring of 2016. The purpose of the first session was orientation: an overview of the study, explanation of the participant consent form, an outline of expectations, a brief test-drive of daily mindful practices (mindful movement and attention training), the completion of the pre-program survey, an introduction to resources, and a brief exploration of rationale for the project – practices that may affect teacher well-being.

The second session reinforced the content's relevance to the practices – how does placing one's attention on the breath affect moment to moment well-being? Many teachers reported noticing an internal shift. The second session gave teachers more experience with the practices. Only a few questions were asked to clarify what to do on their own. Frequency and duration were a concern but the groups settled on a “do what you can, daily” as a good expectation. It was predominantly a chance for the group to practice together.

At the third session teachers received *½ Way Practices* (adapted and enhanced versions of the initial Mindful Practices) on paper and internet resources in the form of applications for smart phones (i.e. the CALM App) and suggestions of more in-depth websites like Mindful.org. This gathering served as an opportunity for participants to

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ask questions and for the instructor to possibly adjust plans for the second half of the project to better suit individuals' needs. One enhancement was more focus on nervous system release linked to the stress response. Some practices are reportedly release physical tension, some bring a sense of focus or calm, other can raise energy and help to initiate or even motivate. We spent some time exploring the ability to notice nervous system signs of present experience and then choosing wisely how to proceed with a familiar practice.

The final group session gave teachers the opportunity to verbally reflect on their experiences, inquire about specific supports and resources to they might need to support their on-going personal practice, as well as give suggestions for program modifications. Practicing together seemed to be the preference of the participants. There comfort with the mindful practices (attend, breathe, move) was evident. The “notice what you feel in your body and make your next choice based on that” Free Form Movement portion went on for more than five minutes (that is significant for those relatively new to mindful movement). Heads were turning, cores were twisting, hands were wringing and feet were circling (and cracking). A few stood up to create their own experience. Twirling and folding and even balancing. We explored a more sequential series called Mindful Rotations, starting with thumbs, individual fingers, then shoulders, all the way down to toes. A moving / swaying balance challenged all. Rest was guided, utilizing imagery and directions to turn the body's energy ON & OFF (make a fist and now release).

We ran short on time and therefore post-program surveys and reflections were sent and returned electronically after an additional two weeks of at-home practice. Ten

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teachers returned all forms, surveys, and written reflections and could be counted in the study. The documents were collected, printed as needed and kept confidential. No requests were made for any forms to be returned. Teachers were sent electronic versions of resources for personal, on-going use beyond the group sessions and the study.

### **Results**

Well-being surveys and written reflections served as the measurement tools used to examine the research question, can a six-week mindful practice program of self-care positively affect the well-being of teachers?

#### **Pre and Post Program Survey**

The pre-program survey was completed at the first session (Appendix C). Overall, this group of educators seem to perceive their well-being in a very positive light. There were no outliers reporting any disagreement with the well-being traits (1 or 2) and few reported neutrality (3).

To examine the 20 traits more carefully the instructor- researcher grouped all 20 traits into two equal categories; the first being Outer Influences Impacting Well-Being, which created a snapshot of perceived environment in which the participants find themselves. These 10 influences seemed to be situational and may be perceived as aspects of life that participants have little immediate control to change.

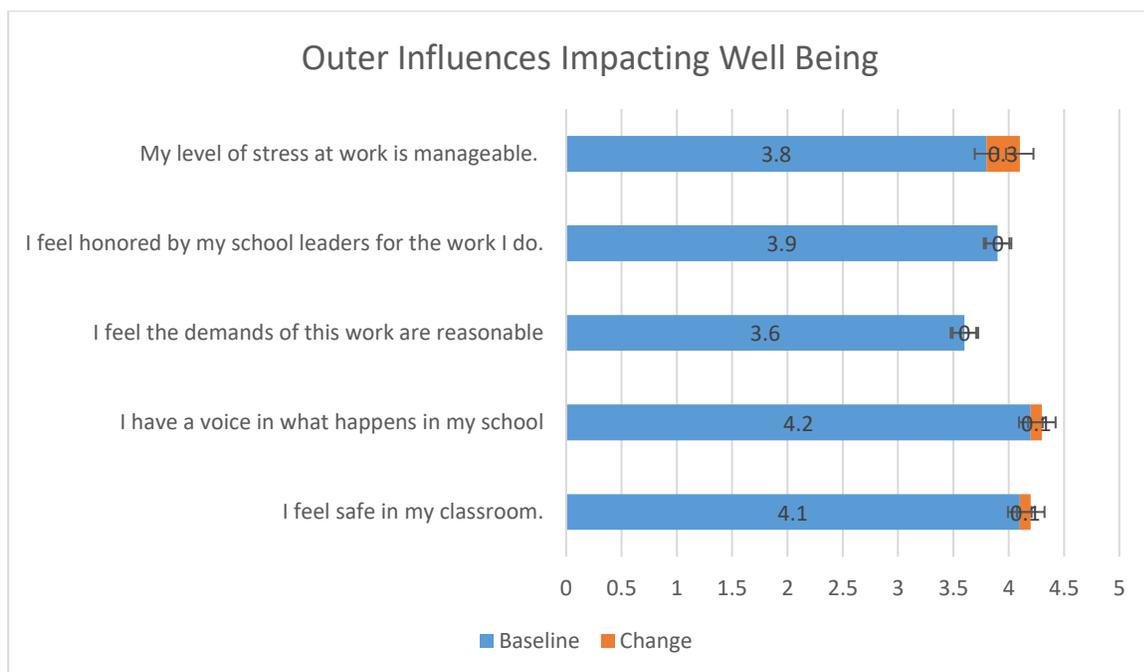
These influences set the scene for participants' lives:

- My level of stress at work is manageable.
- I feel honored by my school leaders for the work I do.

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- I feel the demands of this work are reasonable.
- I have a voice in what happens in my school.
- I feel safe in my classroom.
- My students trust me.
- I have very few health concerns.
- My night-time sleep is restorative.
- After a weekend, I am sufficiently ready for Monday morning.
- I have enough humor and joy in my life.

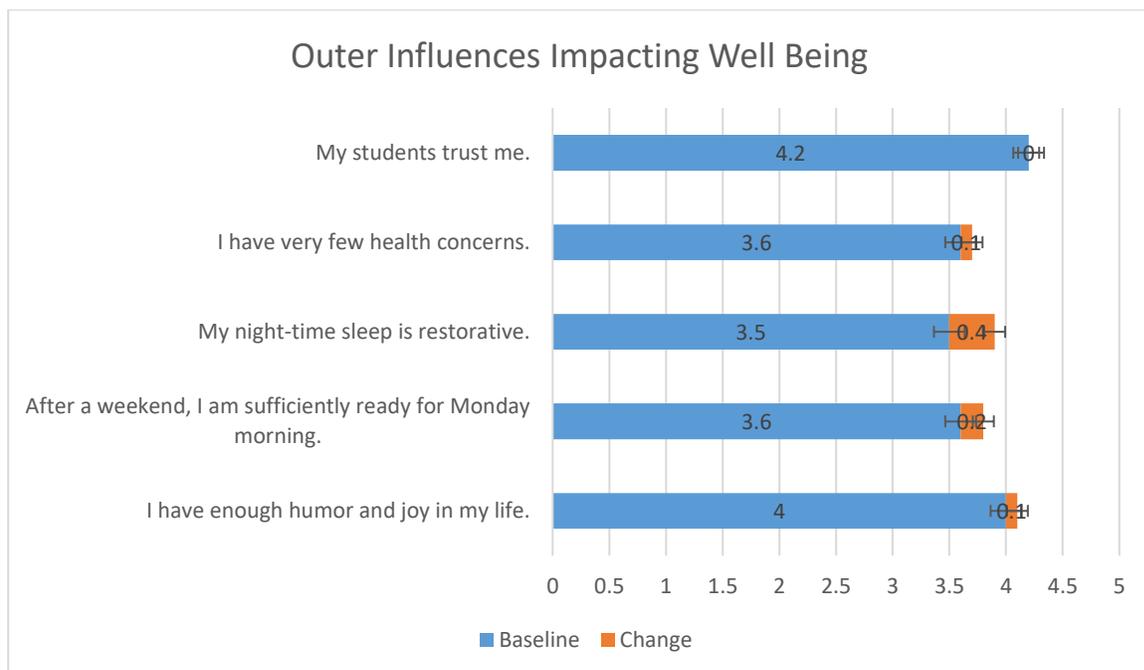
The pre and post surveys of the ten educators (who handed in their documents) were contrasted and averages were calculated using the mean. Figure 1 shows an increase in the trait regarding perception of stress being manageable (+.3) and little or no change in the other influences.



*Figure 1*

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Figure 2 shows the outcomes of the remaining influences, with the most significant change being in the area of restorative sleep (+.4). The second change worth noting relates to the increase in readiness for Monday (+.2)



*Figure 2*

The second category for examining the perceived well-being of the participants was Protective Factors Impacting Well-Being. These traits could be viewed as innate or acquired. They may be in fact more malleable and changeable based on behavior, situation and personal need than those in the Influences category. This category may be considered skill-based in that it includes some self-awareness, self-care and protective strategies that may more directly be utilized to increase well-being while managing the challenges to it.

The Protective Factors are:

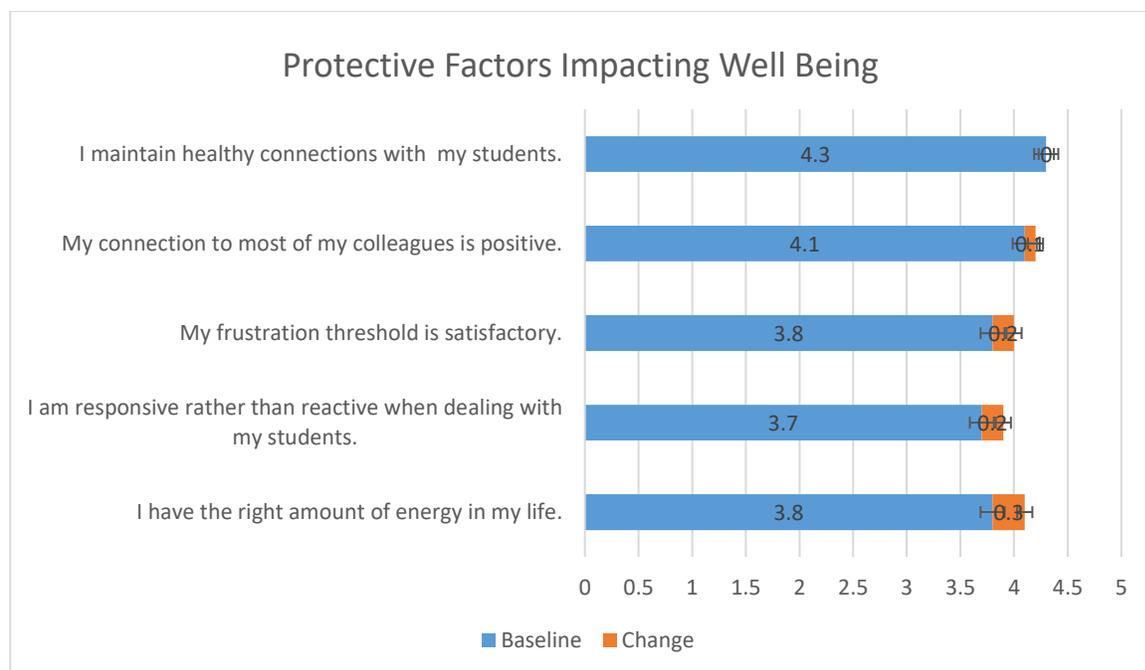
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- I maintain healthy connections with my students.
- My connection to most of my colleagues is positive.
- My frustration threshold is satisfactory.
  
- I am responsive rather than reactive when dealing with my students.
- I have the right amount of energy for my lifestyle.
- I can start, focus and follow-through on tasks as needed.
- I have supportive family and friends in my life.
- I have a place where I can rest my soul.
- I have self-care routines that help me maintain inner balance.
- Most of the food that I eat is good for my body.

Over the course of the six-week mindful program, teachers practiced together in four group sessions as well as on their own time. Anecdotal reports of individual practices varied, regimented daily routines to as needed for sleep assistance to practicing with students using digital activities. No reporting of frequency or style of practice became data. The post-program survey was sent in after four weeks of guided training and two weeks on independent practice at home. Summer vacation began at the conclusion of the group sessions.

Moving onto the factors that play a part in enhancing well-being, Figure 3 shows change in perceptions of behaviors or styles in protecting oneself against challenges. Some impact may be seen in the increases in averages regarding frustration threshold (+.2), responsiveness to students (+.2) and energy (+.3).

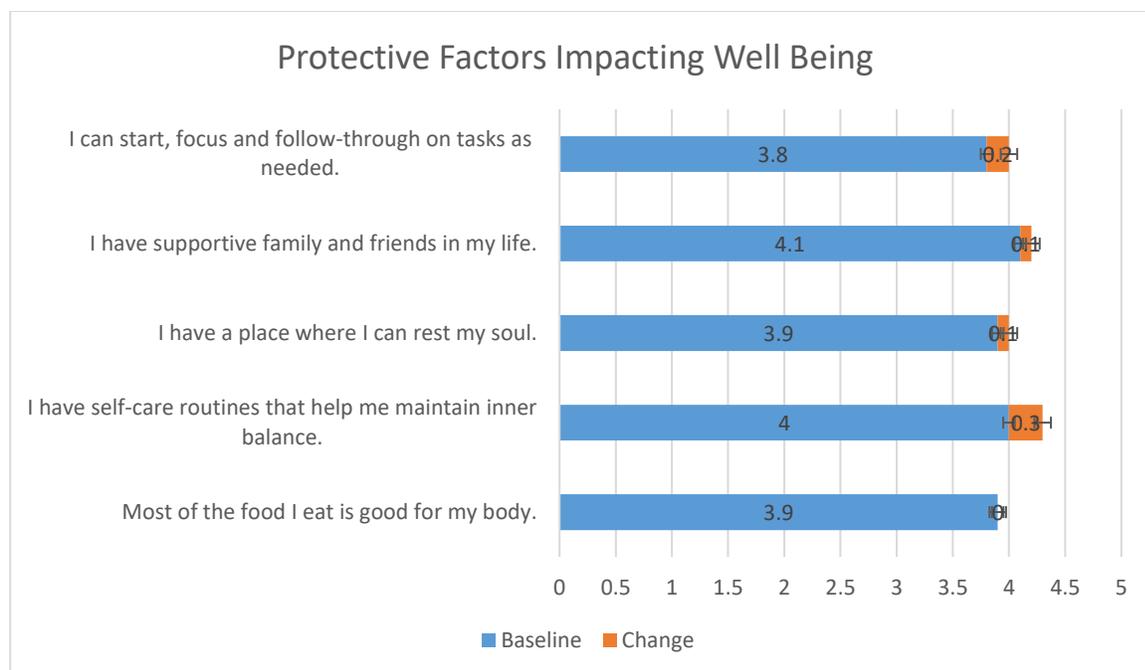
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*Figure 3*

The second group of traits that protect individuals from the negative effects of a challenging profession are listed in Figure 4. Two traits emerge as increasing over the six-week program, task initiation combined with follow-through (+.2), as well as having routines to maintain one's inner balance (+.3).

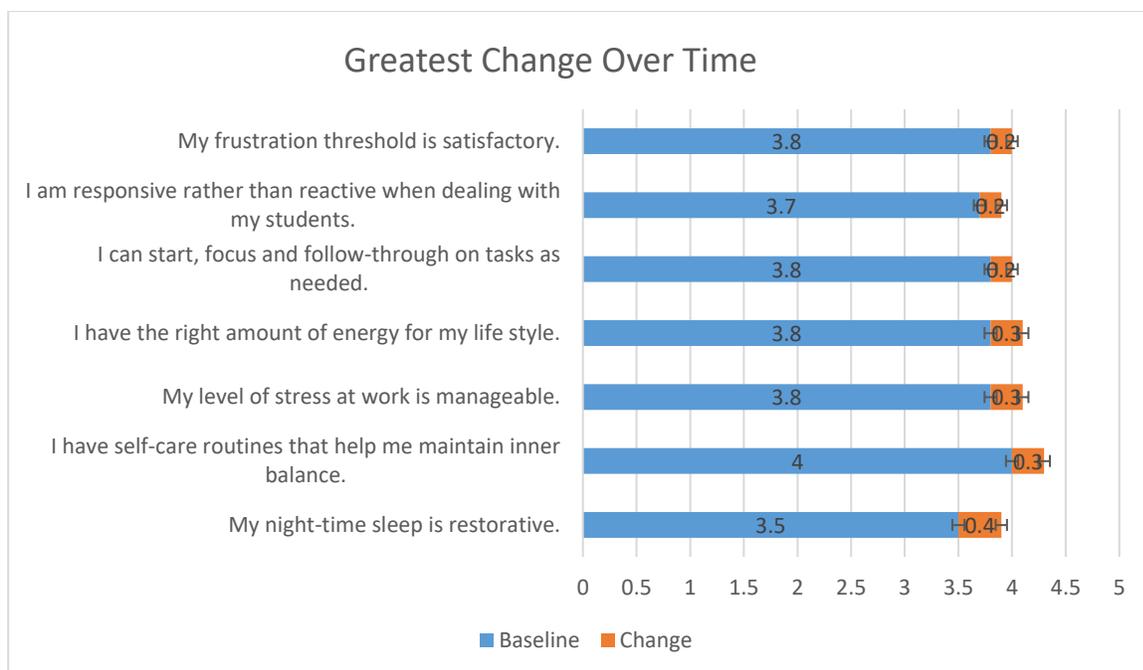
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*Figure 4*

A closer look requires a refined focus on those traits or influences that seemed to change the most. Figure 5 teases out the seven most-changed averages in the teachers' responses. Interestingly, five out of the seven most impacted traits are considered Protective Factors, while the remaining two (top) changers were Outer Influences (seeing stress as manageable and restorative sleep).

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*Figure 5*

## Reflection

The Reflection Forms (Appendix D) brought out some insights into ease of practice and perceptions of impact. Responses went beyond what was gleaned from the surveys. Sometimes just asking the direct questions leads to clarity that ranked surveys cannot show. The following responses are from a few the teachers after six weeks. Some questions were left blank by some teachers. Others did not attempt to complete the form.

How do you feel your personal practice is coming along?

- I was using more at school, not as quickly in personal/family life.
- I can't seem to get in a routine now that I am home.

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- I find it easier to practice during the summer break, I can give it time.
- I integrate it into my current routine activities. I am practicing two times each day.
- I can do the practices really well with the group, but a personal practice doesn't come naturally. Yet.

What are the bright spots to these practices / this program?

- I like that the practices enhance my daily bike ride as well as one meal each day.
- Restful sleep.
- Our time together seems so helpful.
- The walking practice surprised me. I really liked it. I will try it on my own.
- I am more aware of little things, pleasant things that I have been missing.
- It's summer, a good time to try a new routine.
- My days after the mornings we practiced as a group were less stressful.

What are some road-blocks that you have encountered regarding the practices?

- Time.
- Took me a while to find which simple practices really came naturally for me.

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- I tend to only think of the practices when stressed but would like to use it as prevention more often.
- Quietening my mind is really hard.
- None.

What kinds of resources will assist you in sustaining your practice?

- More of the apps would help.
- I need to actually buy the book for teachers.
- No more.
- Audio practices would be great.
- I am already overwhelmed by resources, those we have are enough.
- More group sessions. I love doing this work with my friends.

### **Discussion**

The researcher deemed this project as successful. The teachers who volunteered for the program were enthusiastic and committed - to trying something new and to showing up early on Friday mornings. They seemed to start with a well-being baseline that was already solid, most often agreeing to the traits that set one up for success in how they perceived the outer influences, as well as having an awareness of protective factors and most often having them in place already. This appears to be a typically, high-functioning, self-selected group of dedicated educators in a manageable environment. The baseline indicated by initial (preprogram) responses was somewhat high from the start.

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The instructor-researcher was initially intimidated by the pre-program results. Baseline averages were high in the Agree column (3.92), enough to make her wonder if any movement would be possible toward Strongly Agree. Her experience with teachers' baseline responses (citing anecdotal and program evaluation data) over the years tended to be heavily weighted in the disagree column. Low baselines gave the survey results a higher chance of improvement.

But the results of this study show some improvement regarding what the teachers were perceiving. Adding or integrating mindful practices to existing self-care routines affected their sense of well-being and enhanced their tool kits for self-care, even if only slightly.

The instructor-researcher is most intrigued by the Greatest Change analysis. Protective Factors seem to be in peoples' control, to enhance and improve. Those five traits showed the most change over time. The two other traits that evidenced the greatest change were perception of stress and sleep quality, both being outer influences that can be possibly adapted into protective factors, with practice.

### **Limitations**

The instructor-researcher aimed to work with the teacher participants over a longer span of time and earlier in the school year; however, the research process and extenuating circumstances resulted in a very late start and an abbreviated project time. The energy level of the teachers was somewhat spent by the time the group sessions began. Attitudes were better than expected though, perhaps due to a post-testing environment. The participants seemed exhausted but open-minded. The timing of the

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research study extended through the last days of school, which is an understandably distracting and hectic time. However, the teachers showed up and had no trouble linking their self-care and well-being to their ability to skillfully manage the end-of-year hubbub. It was a relevant and useful project, albeit brief in nature.

Data collection was the biggest challenge. The completed post-program surveys and reflections, in order to encompass a full six-week experience, were sent to the instructor-researcher after the school year had ended. The summer vacation mindset (wanting to healthfully distance oneself from school pressures,) combined with the lessened communication lines (school email verses home email) posed unforeseen challenges for the instructor-researcher to gather her data.

A limitation to the delivery of the program/training also existed. In the planning phases, the instructor-researcher hoped for three to four two-hour sessions, preferably in the afternoons. The sessions would have included ample time for experiential practice, questions and reflections, group/collaborative work, exploration of content and creative grappling with concepts. Instead, the program felt condensed at times.

Finally, in-person data collection at the beginning and end of the study would have streamlined the process. One-hour sessions and electronic data collection created a different type of program; one that the instructor-researcher hopes was still genuine and meaningful in the teachers' view.

### **Implications of the Study**

The instructor-researcher gleaned many insights into the useful delivery of mindful practices programming as a tool for affecting teacher well-being. Mornings

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really seemed to work well for some teachers; the well-being practices prepared them for a less stressful day, possibly protecting them from the pending challenges they will face.

Although the one-hour sessions felt short, it may have been the perfect amount of time for practice. Perhaps in the future, content and theory could be shared through another medium (e.g., digitally).

It is possible that the results of the survey indicate a need to revise the traits that truly link to well-being. This researcher-instructor would like to ask future participants to wrestle with defining what determines, influences and blocks their own well-being. The 20 traits on the survey may not have painted an authentic picture of well-being.

The Reflection Form should have included a more directed question or two relating to well-being. Although insights were valuable, the guided questions seemed to skirt the research question (Mindful Practices Affect Well-Being) and focused more on the experience with the practices, style of program and outcomes.

The expanded time of eight weeks or even 12 weeks in duration that most studies espouse, could likely create more impact on sustainability. The instructor-researcher will push for more sensible programming of at least eight weeks for future trainings and teacher-support programming.

### **Contribution to the Field of Supporting Teachers**

This study adds to the body of research regarding teacher self-care. Redirecting its focus away from testing and toward student outcomes, education moves forward, including a shift of attention to caring for the caregiver (the teacher). It is the instructor-

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researcher's hope that this and studies like this will fortify the need to expand the view of what tools truly support the healthy growth of children -the well-being of those on the frontlines in classrooms every day, the teachers.

In the field of education, the current emphasis has been on the evaluation process and not on the support process – for both students and teachers. The pendulum does seem to be shifting back to the human needs being at the core of education rather than the measuring of outcomes. Studies that provide personal tools for self-care and ask teachers to reflect on their own experiences serve to bolster the care and honoring that teachers feel coming from the decision-makers and community.

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**Appendix A****Permission to Conduct Action Research Study**

**Study:** Mindful Practices Affect Teacher Well Being

**Research/instructor:** Wynne Kinder

**Participants:** Full-time classroom teachers and/or para-educators (age 18 or older) employed by a public school district

**University Program:** Master of Arts in Education Program at Eastern Mennonite University

**Purpose of the Study:** Utilizing self-reports: surveys, practice logs, and sleep journals, the study will measure the effects of a six-week mindful program on teacher wellbeing.

**Expectations of Participants:** The mindful practices in this study will include six weeks of guided and individual practice. Teachers volunteering to participate in this study will attend four group sessions (1 hour each). A written/electronic guide with Wellness Works in Schools' resources will be available to support personal, on-going practice. Participants will be asked to complete three measurement tools to provide (base-line, on-going and post-program) data regarding the possible effects of a mindful program on teachers' well-being.

**Exit Strategy:** There are no foreseeable risks for participants. Should participation in this study cause undue stress or discomfort of any kind, the participant/teacher can email or call the researcher to exit. [xxxx@xxxxxxx.com](mailto:xxxx@xxxxxxx.com) (xxx)xxx-xxxx.

**Confidentiality:** All of the self-reports, surveys, and teacher information will be kept confidential, and will be copied and provided to the individual teachers upon request.

## MINDFUL PRACTICES AFFECT TEACHER WELL-BEING

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the purpose and methods of this research study. My signature below indicates my permission for school employees to participate in this research study.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

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**Appendix B****Participant Consent Form for Action Research Study**

**Study:** Mindful Practices Affect Teacher Well-being

**Researcher/Instructor:** Wynne Kinder

**Participants:** Educators within school settings

**University Program:** Master of Arts in Education Program at Eastern Mennonite University

**Purpose of the Study:** Utilizing self-reports (surveys, practice logs, and sleep journals) the study/project will introduce practices, provide support for teachers' self-care and measure the effects of a four-week mindful program focusing on teacher well-being.

**Expectations of Participants:** The mindful practices in this study will include six weeks of guided instruction (4 hours) and individual practice (5-10 minutes daily). Teachers volunteering to participate in this study will attend four group sessions (1 hour each). The practices can include: gentle movement, a variety of settled forms (seated, reclined, lying down, standing), and breath awareness – all done by choice, based on personal preference and accessibility.

A written/digital guide with Wellness Works in Schools' resources will support their personal, individual practice. Participants will be asked to complete three measurement tools to provide [base-line survey (~5 minutes), post-program survey (~5 minutes) and post-program reflection form (~5 minutes)] data regarding the possible effects of a mindful program on teachers' well-being.

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**Risks and Benefits:** Occasionally, these practices bring up an awareness of physical discomfort, anxiousness and negative feelings. Some participants may also experience a sense of rest, comfort or nervous system release. While there may be periods of unfamiliarity and transition to new experiences, all instruction/invitation is sensitive to individual needs and is stress/trauma-informed. This program is not therapeutic or clinical in nature. It is self-driven, entirely choice-based and purely voluntary. A resource list of local counseling support will be made available at the initial group meeting.

**Exit Strategy:** Should participation in this study cause undue stress at any point, the participant/teacher can exit without fear of penalty or negative consequence. Exiting participants can email or call the researcher to withdraw from the project and can obtain recommendations of local support. [xxxx@xxx.com](mailto:xxxx@xxx.com) or (xxx)xxx-xxxx

**Confidentiality:** All self-reports, surveys, and teacher information will be kept confidential, in a secured file by the researcher. Materials (electronic and/or hard-copy) will be duplicated and returned to the individual teachers upon request. It will all be destroyed/deleted after use in this study. Results of the research will be reported as aggregate summary data only. No individually identifiable information will be presented unless explicit permission is given to do so.

Participants have the right to review the results of the research. A copy of the results may be obtained by contacting the researcher. [xxxxxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@gmail.com) or (xxx) xxx-xxxx

## MINDFUL PRACTICES AFFECT TEACHER WELL-BEING

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand of the foregoing information explaining the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a subject. I understand the potential challenges and changes that I may experience during and as a result of the project. I agree to the expectations of me as a subject. My signature below indicates my voluntary consent to participate in this research.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographics Survey** (optional)

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender Identification \_\_\_\_\_ Length of daily commute \_\_\_\_\_ minutes

Level of Education \_\_\_\_\_ Specific Certification \_\_\_\_\_

Years in Teaching \_\_\_\_\_ Discipline(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) \_\_\_\_\_

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## Appendix C

**Wellness Works Survey for Teachers**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ Pre-program \_\_\_\_ Post-program

**CONFIDENTIALITY** – This document will only be used for analysis in this action research project and will be kept confidential.

**Please circle your response.**

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

My level of stress at work is manageable. 1 2 3 4 5

My connection to most of my colleagues is positive. 1 2 3 4 5

I feel honored by my school leaders for the work I do. 1 2 3 4 5

My frustration threshold is satisfactory. 1 2 3 4 5

I feel the demands of this work are reasonable. 1 2 3 4 5

I maintain healthy connections with my students. 1 2 3 4 5

I am responsive rather than reactive when dealing with my students. 1 2 3 4 5

I have a voice in what happens in my school. 1 2 3 4 5

I feel safe in my classroom. 1 2 3 4 5

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My students trust me. 1 2 3 4 5

I have the right amount of energy for my lifestyle. 1 2 3 4 5

I have very few health concerns. 1 2 3 4 5

My night-time sleep is restorative. 1 2 3 4 5

After a weekend, I am sufficiently ready for Monday morning. 1 2 3 4 5

I can start, focus and follow-through on tasks as needed. 1 2 3 4 5

I have supportive family and friends in my life. 1 2 3 4 5

I have a place where I can rest my soul. 1 2 3 4 5

I have self-care routines that help me maintain inner balance. 1 2 3 4 5

Most of the food that I eat is good for my body. 1 2 3 4 5

I have enough humor and joy in my life. 1 2 3 4 5

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**Appendix D****Reflections on Mindful Practices**

Feel free to complete **one, all or just some** of the guide questions below.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

How do you feel your personal practice is coming along?

What are the bright spots to these practices?

What are some road-blocks that you have encountered?

Are you aware of any changes in your sleep quality during the program?

Explain.

What kinds of resources will assist you in sustaining your practice?

*Thank you!*