



Evaluation Report: Ann Arbor Public School Educators' Mindfulness Training Program

In the fall of 2019, 20 Ann Arbor Public School (AAPS) educators initially signed up to participate in a 22-hour mindfulness skills training program sponsored by the MEA and AAEA. The training occurred for two hours after school over eight weeks and for six hours on a weekend day. Enrolled educators represented all building levels (preschool through high school), and included those working in general and special education. Educators new to the district as well as those with a long-term history participated. Three educators dropped out within the first three weeks due to scheduling issues. For the 17 who completed the program, on average no more than one session was missed.

Over the course of the training, educators described the positive value they were experiencing from learning mindfulness, sharing rich anecdotes about changes in their interactions with their students and at home with family members; about their health (sleep, weight, blood pressure); and experience of daily stress. It was not uncommon for educators to also spontaneously express how replenished they felt after each session in comparison to when they arrived.

In order to obtain a more objective evaluation of the training program, we administered pre-and post-self-report surveys that contained five identical questions. Participants were asked to rate on a 9-point scale their level of daily stress; the felt impact of stress on their physical and mental health, including sleep; the perceived interference of stress on their quality of teaching; their overall skill in managing stress and specific skill in managing stress arising in the classroom. Statistical analysis using paired T-tests demonstrated that for each of these five items, mindfulness training **significantly improved (p < .001)** educators' experience of stress and skills in managing stress. Mean changes on these items are depicted in Figure 1 in the Appendix that follows this summary.

Upon program completion, educators also rated their perceived benefits of the training. All educators reported highly benefiting both personally and professionally, with an average rating of 4.5 and 4.4 on a 5-point scale. They also unanimously affirmed that they would recommend this program to colleagues in their own school and other schools.

Participants were asked to write responses to three open-ended questions in the post-evaluation survey. In regard to the first question, "What did you value or appreciate the most about participating in this program?", the most typically repeated comments reflected gratitude for learning new tools to regulate stress, developing self-awareness and relaxation, and having accountability and a community of practice. When asked specifically about how mindfulness was helping in their lives or in the classroom with their students, educators reported improvements in sleep, emotional reactivity, anxiety, quality of interpersonal interactions, and self-care. They described new skills in working with stressful emotions that arose, and perceived themselves as more mindful in their interactions with students, able to listen more empathetically to others and be more intentional in their interactions. Graham Hannah, a high school teacher, summarized the training experience as, "the most important thing that I could have done to improve my skills coming into the district. Working 15 hour days is stressful. This helped a lot". Collated verbatim responses of educators to these three open-ended questions are included in the Appendix.

In conclusion, the data demonstrates that intensive mindfulness training had a substantial and positive impact on improving the perceived health, well-being and interpersonal relationships of AAPS educators.

Appendix

- A. Figure 1 Pre- post Changes in Educators' Ratings of Stress
- B. Collated Verbatim Written Responses(based on 16 questionnaires; one participant did not complete the past questionnaire due to a severe illness)

A.

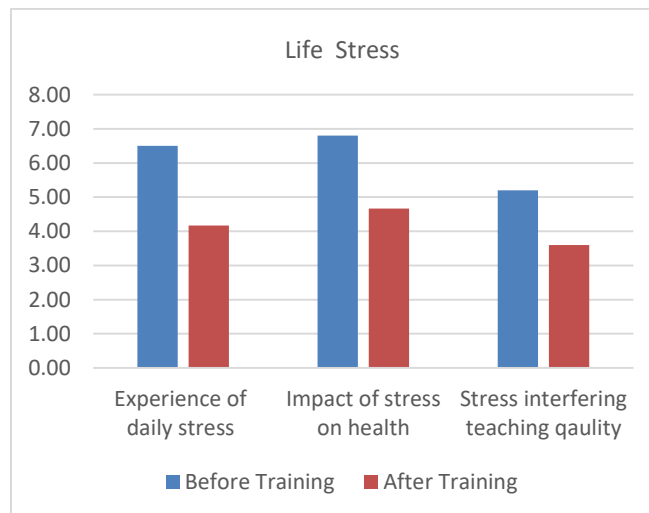
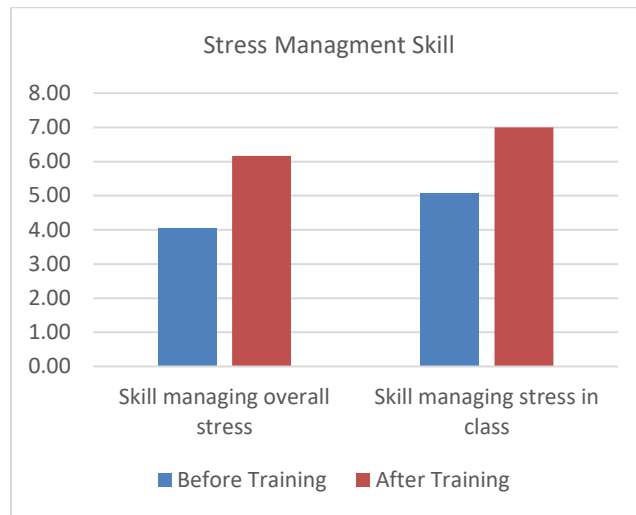


Fig 1: Pre-post Changes in Educators' Ratings of Stress

B. Collated Verbatim Written Responses to Open-Ended Questions

What did you value or appreciate the most about participating in this program?

- Being part of a community;
- Tools/strategies for mindfulness;
- Free to participate

- Learning strategies and mindsets that help me let go of stress and accept things I cannot change;
- Making time for myself

- Skilled leaders, lots of examples/methods to try, lots of materials provided via handouts / emails.

- Learned different ways to meditate; Inspiring stuff to read;
- Accountability to practice

- Having consistent community to practice with and learn with

- Common minded community; Support and ability to share;
- Learning and regularly practicing these mindfulness skills that have so positively impacted many areas of my life

- Loved the time to focus to heal myself;
- Liked the teachings each week;
- Community

- Relaxation after work;
- Techniques learned;
- Information and handouts;
- The “attitude”. The “dots”

- The welcoming atmosphere and willingness of the leaders to help us improve our practice, no matter how slowly that happened

- Learning multiple practice techniques and working with other teachers who face similar challenges

- Varied skills and practices and willingness to explain and expand

- The opportunity to refresh my practice and try new techniques;
- Being able to step back and be the mindfulness student rather than leader

- Learning self-awareness and to help myself to be calmer and restorative and less reactive.

- The group mode;
- The unity we created;
- Exercises to help us improve our lives presently and for the future

- Affirmation that mindfulness is worth it;
- Immersive experience of silent retreat—a rewarding challenge
- I now have tools that I can utilize to support my mental health in order to deliver high-leverage practice over many years;
- The nature of the job is stressful, this truly helped

How do you see that mindfulness has helped you or is helping you, if at all?

- More aware of emotions;
- Able to calm down better when I am anxious
- Mindfulness helps me leave work at work so I can release anxiety at home and rest to be ready to teach the next day;
- I can sleep
- Being more present and less reactive to daily triggers / events
- Helped me to let go of thoughts at night
- It helps me feel grounded in a fast paced work environment, through life's challenges personally too
- I am calmer, less reactive, and better equipped to manage stress and effectively communicate - due to learning how to slow down before responding
- Calmer, making time for myself;
- Loving kindness - helping me in all relationships
- I feel more peaceful and present
- Sleeping better;
- Better interaction/reactions with students;
- Better interactions/reactions with my our family
- Staying in the present moment;
- Remaining calm;
- Patience;
- Sleeping better;
- Overall self-care
- Daily interactions with others and through my own thoughts and ideas
- Mindfulness allows me to leave work at school; I may work early/late but when I leave I truly leave school concerns behind
- More calm and patient with students and friends and family;
- Helps manage stress
- Life still happens but I have learned to let go and I am sleeping better
- More calm and patient with students and friends and family;

- Helps manage stress
- Learning to breathe, pause, and acknowledge my body's experience has helped reduce stress significantly
- I sleep better, respond more thoughtfully and effectively, and am able to self-soothe back into a mental state fit for teaching students

What did you learn new about yourself that will be helpful to you as a classroom teacher or interpersonally in your life?

- Taking a breath makes a huge difference.
- I am able to use meditations that are a better fit for me; I've always disliked it because sitting still is hard for me
- That I can be more present and make the time for myself
- I learned ways to work with emotions that arise
- How important a consistent practice is for my well-being, relationships and health
- I am an empathetic listener.
- Reacting better in difficult conversations and "stressful" interactions;
- I use mindfulness with renewed commitment in the classroom
- Being fully present
- That I can be more intentional in terms of my actions
- That by slowing down I can accomplish more
- How to listen mindfully to others better
- Reminder - for my own daughter at home - trauma and physical pain aren't necessarily a good match for mindfulness and that's ok, visualization is also valuable
- That there are many types of meditation, but I enjoy loving kindness most
- I like mindfulness more and more
- I can help myself and others to find more peace and appreciation in our daily lives
- I can model mindfulness in ways that will help improve the quality of life for my students