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Reducing Teacher Stress Using Mindfulness

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Reducing Teacher Stress Using Mindfulness Exercises

Allison Morgan

Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

Northwestern College, Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

The prevalence of teacher stress is real and is currently at the forefront of recent research and studies. Stress has impacted teachers who are employed at Woodrow Wilson Elementary located in Newton, Iowa. There are ways to deal with stress and one of those ways would be implementing mindfulness exercises. This school improvement plan would implement mindfulness exercise training for teachers during the 2023-2024 school year. A teacher stress survey would be given before implementing the training, and the same survey would be given at the completion of the training. A reflection will be administered to determine if teachers feel like they will use mindfulness exercises in the future.

Keywords: teacher stress, teacher burnout, educational stress, mindfulness interventions, mindfulness exercises

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Reducing Teacher Stress Using Mindfulness Exercises

Stress is something that can affect a person's body and mind. Stress is mental tension from a difficult situation that can cause worry (World Health Organization, n.d.). All people experience stress at different levels. How people handle and respond to stress can affect their well-being and health. Stress symptoms can be physical or emotional. Physical symptoms may cause stomach aches, headaches, exhaustion, or trouble with sleep habits, whereas emotional symptoms may cause depression, anxiety, or decision-making (McEwen & Sapolsky, 2006).

Recently, teacher stress has come to the forefront as a current topic and ways teachers can help combat it. In empirical studies that have been done, high levels of stress along with low well-being have been noticed in teachers (Schwarzer et al., 2021). Currently, one of the most stressful professions in the United States is teaching (Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, 2016). Causes of teacher stress have included lack of support, workload, and student discipline (Collie et al., 2015, Cancio et al., 2018). Teacher stress causes burnout, affects mental well-being, and influences the climate of a classroom (DiCarlo et al., 2019). Students can be affected by teacher stress. Teachers can become impatient, irritable, and frustrated which in turn affects students academically and emotionally (Gray et al., 2017). Job retention, rapid turnover, absenteeism, and early retirement can be a domino effect of teacher stress. The problem is that teachers need a way to process and handle stress.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to utilize mindfulness exercises to help minimize teacher stress and promote positive mental health. Mindfulness is being aware, and paying full attention to the present moment while focusing on mind, body, and breath (DiCarlo et al., 2019). Mindfulness is a conscious awareness of your current feelings without judgment.

Mindfulness practices can help reduce stress. These practices may include meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, or emotional regulation (DiCarlo et al., 2019, Zarate et al., 2019).

Research for this school improvement plan included literature research that was peer-reviewed, within the last ten years, and found on Northwestern College's DeWitt Library and Google Scholar. The topics of articles that were used in this research were teacher stress, teacher mental health, teacher job satisfaction, and mindfulness. The common factor in almost all of the research was how prominent teacher stress is. This scope of research shows ways to find interventions and studies, more specifically mindfulness, that could impact teacher stress. The value of researching this topic and working on this school improvement plan is finding a way to help alleviate teacher stress and improve mental health by using mindfulness exercises with the teachers who work at Woodrow Wilson Elementary School in Newton, Iowa.

The literature review will validate the ongoing problem of teacher stress and studies that have been done to identify ways to help reduce teacher stress. The review will explain what inquiries have been done regarding this topic. Methods and interventions will be explored from different studies as well as limitations and gaps in the research.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

There is a common issue in the lives of people who are part of the teaching profession. The current trend of teacher stress and well-being has caused researchers to do studies on this problem. Researchers have looked at the causes, effects, and interventions to help combat this issue. Studies report that teacher stress has affected mental well-being, anxiety levels, poor classroom climate, job burnout, absenteeism, and abandonment of the profession (Agyapong et al., 2022; DiCarlo et al., 2019; Marques et al., 2020). This literature review will look at the prevalence, current studies, interventions, and mindfulness of teacher stress.

Teacher Stress Prevalence

Research studies conducted on teacher stress have reported that teaching is one of the most highly stressful professions (Collie et al., 2012; Embse et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2016; Jōgi et al., 2022; Schwarzer et al., 2021). Teacher stress has been correlated with poor physical and mental health. A qualitative study conducted by Schwarzer et al. (2021) examined whether teachers could mentalize to buffer stress and severe psychological symptoms. Mentalizing was used by Schwarzer et al. (2021) as a proactive way to help teachers deal with daily stressors of psychological symptoms. Mentalizing is the ability to be aware of one's own feelings along with others' feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and desires (Schwarzer et al., 2021). In the study conducted by Schwarzer et al. (2021), 215 teachers participated in research to determine whether there was a negative correlation between distress and teachers' well-being with a positive correlation between teachers' well-being and mentalizing. The findings of Schwarzer et al. (2021), did find that negative psychological symptoms affect well-being while a subjective amount of stress and well-being correlates positively to mentalizing. Global distress affects well-being, while global

distress along with mentalizing can have a positive effect on well-being. (Schwarzer, et al., 2021).

Greenberg et al. (2016) did research on teacher stress and health. According to research by Greenberg et al. (2016), common physiological and psychological stressors are poor sleep habits, anxiety, depression, and even injury. Greenberg et al. (2016) reported that the physical health of teachers is affected by psychological stress. Teacher stress was found to be higher by 1% than the occupation of doctors and tied with the occupation of nurses (Greenberg et al., 2016). In the research done by Greenberg et al. (2016), four main sources were pinpointed to teacher stress. The sources of teacher stress were job demands, work resources, school organizations, and teacher social and emotional competence (Greenberg et al., 2016). Greenberg et al. (2016) suggest that future research includes assessing the validity of policies and programs that will help reduce teacher stress and well-being.

A research study was conducted on teachers' daily physiological stress and positive effect in relation to their general occupational well-being. Jōgi et al., (2022) researched how physiological stress related to cortisol slopes during the middle of a school day. Cortisol is a stress hormone that can have a physical effect on a person's body. Jogi et al. (2022) used salivary cortisol to help determine physiological stress levels throughout the day of teachers. Jogi et al. (2022) wanted to see how high self-efficacy, positive school climate, and burnout symptoms could affect a person's cortisol level. The findings of research from Jogi et al. (2022) suggest that when teachers believe in their ability to have classroom management and handle student situations, they had lower cortisol levels in the middle of the day. Contrary to the study's expectations, researchers found that psychological stress and well-being do not directly affect

each other, but that changes in a person may take more time before having an impact on the other (Jogi et al., 2022).

Collie et al. (2012) looked at the properties of the Teacher Well-Being Scale (TWBS) in a quantitative study measuring stress, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. In this study, 603 teachers participated from 4 different district levels and teacher associations in British Columbia (Collie et al., 2012). The TWBS measured 3 factors of well-being with teachers: workload, well-being, and organizational well-being (Collie et al., 2012). Student interaction well-being relates to how teachers perceive student behavior and student motivation (Collie et al., 2012). Findings from this study indicated that there are correlations between job satisfaction, and well-being related to teacher stress (Collie et al., 2012). Collie et al. (2012) concluded that the TWBS could be a valid measuring tool to assess teacher well-being and promote future teacher well-being.

Teacher stress is having an effect on the teaching profession worldwide. Saloviita & Pakarinen (2021) concluded lack of resources and job demands are a source of teacher burnout. Friedman's second edition of the Maslach Burnout Scale was used to measure teacher burnout which had three subdomains. The subdomains were exhaustion, lack of accomplishment, and depersonalization (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Saloviita & Pakarinen (2021) conducted research on 4,568 Finnish primary school teachers and found that there is a number of differences in how student-teacher-organizational level attributes were associated with all three sources of teacher burnout. This research concluded that teacher burnout is a multifaceted phenomenon (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021).

Teacher stress has impacted the functionality of school systems. According to Greenberg et al, (2016), absenteeism and high turnover have cost school districts billions of dollars. Greenberg et al. (2016) noted that within the first five years of teaching, nearly half of the

teachers will leave which in turn leaves school districts with consequential loss. Turnover rates can increase in creating poor-performing schools (Greenberg et al., 2016). In mixed-method research conducted by Ferguson et al. (2022), the study looked at the correlation between absenteeism and stressors that teachers have. Some teachers are leaving the profession altogether or retiring earlier than expected due to teacher stress (Ferguson et al., 2022). Ferguson et al. (2022) reported that when teachers suppress their negative feelings toward their job, they are more likely to end up leaving the teaching profession. Ferguson et al. (2022) researched teachers who were leaving teaching and what decisions affected their reasoning. Ferguson et al. (2022) study research found from the survey that teachers took leaves of absence due to poor relationships with students, co-workers, and administrators.

Quantitative research conducted by Lensen et al. (2021) recognized that a teacher's health can have negative effects on teacher job satisfaction, teacher capabilities, lower student achievement, and risk of leaving the profession permanently. Lensen et al. (2021) investigated the need for helping to alleviate teacher stress using the technique of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). The study conducted by Lensen et al. (2021) was researched due to promising results from other studies using the MBSR program. Although Lensen et al. (2021) found that it is unknown that MBSR is effective for stress reduction in primary education, it did find from other studies that MBSR is a promising intervention for teacher stress. Based on the literature and the research, the prevalence of teacher stress in different countries around the world is increasing; therefore, studies have been done to determine why, how, and what interventions to use to help decrease it.

Teacher Stress Studies and Reviews

There have been many studies and reviews on teacher stress. Embse et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of studies that had evidence-based treatments for teacher stress interventions. This study was conducted to determine what types of stress interventions have been published in research, what assessments have been used to evaluate interventions, and what interventions were most successful in effectiveness to combat teacher stress. During this research, relevant domains were searched on teacher stress, interventions, and treatments along with teacher burnout, depression, and fatigue (Embse et al., 2019). This study review pointed towards mindfulness-based interventions that are used more often and administered more frequently since 2010 (Embse et al., 2019). Embse et al. (2019) reported that there was little steady use of specific scales or measurement of teacher stress which points to little agreement upon a single scale to measure teacher stress. In a similar scoping review by Agyapong, et. al. (2022), studies were conducted on teacher stress, burnout, depression, and anxiety along with their prevalence and how they correlate. Review studies consisted of distribution by continents with Europe 40%, Asia 30%, North America 19%, Africa 6%, Oceania 4%, and South America 1% (Agyapong, et al., 2022). Agyapong et. al. (2022) found that teachers' psychological and mental health indirectly affects students. There was a large range of correlating prevalence to teacher burnout, anxiety, and depression (Agyapong et al., 2022). Difficulty in the use of instruments made it challenging for researchers when making comparisons between different studies (Agyapong et al., 2022). This review was able to identify stress risk factors that can benefit by addressing these issues with teacher stress (Agyapong et al., 2022).

In a cross-sectional study of Greek primary school educators, 786 teachers participated in quantitative research regarding the stress and well-being of teachers (Dimitrios et al., 2023). The

study was conducted to identify the relevance of stress in the profession of teaching (Dimitrios et al., 2023). Teachers filled out the online TSWQ (Teacher Subjective Well-being Questionnaire) which is a survey that was created in 2015 to assess teachers' subjective well-being and several psychological parameters (Dimitrios et al., 2023). During this research, the Greek version of the PSQI (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index) questionnaire was given 30 days preceding the day of completion (Dimitrios et al., 2023). Dimitrios et al. (2023) concluded that teachers need to have support to have the prospect of reducing teacher stress and helping to improve their quality of life. More than half of the teachers reported sleep problems which in turn gave evidence of teachers' well-being and health in general (Dimitrios et al., 2023). Based on this study, several interventions have been proposed to help support teachers, and prospective studies are required (Dimitrios et al., 2023).

Li & Zhang (2019) had a similar study to Dimitrios et al. (2023) as teachers' work stress and work-related well-being were researched. Li & Zhang (2019) proposed that stress and work-related well-being were affected by the occupation of a kindergarten teacher. In addition, Li & Zhang (2019) inquired whether social support would balance the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and work-related being. The research was conducted on 615 kindergarten teachers in the provinces of China and measured with the Teacher Stress Inventory (Li & Zhang, 2019). Added to the Teacher Stress Inventory, psychological capital was measured with the Psychological Capital Scale, a work-related well-being questionnaire, and a social support questionnaire. Li & Zhang (2019) found that the occupational stress of kindergarten teachers negatively affects their work-related being which has been predictive of other studies. Findings indicate that higher psychological capital and social support created positive work-related well-being (Li & Zhang, 2019). When faced with negative occupational stress, those teachers with

higher psychological capital were also the teachers who would seek out help and support (Li & Zhang, 2019).

Teacher Stress Interventions

There have been studies and research done to help alleviate teacher stress by using interventions. Eyal et al. (2019) did a study on the implementation of the MBGTS (Mind-Body Group for Teacher Stress) which is an intervention program for teachers who are experiencing trauma-related stress. The three goals of this intervention were to reduce teacher stress, create self-care and coping routines by instilling mind-body skills, and help improve teacher understanding when dealing with student trauma-related stress (Eyal et al., 2019). Teachers from two public schools in the southwestern part of the United States participated in this mixed-method study. (Eyal et al., 2019). The research included three weekly 60-minute sessions for a duration of three weeks (Eyal et al., 2019). In this study, Eyal et al. (2019) looked at teachers who were brought together in a supportive environment where they learned about mind-body techniques and were able to be more informed about trauma-related stress. Teachers in this group reported that the group was helpful and informative and they were planning on utilizing the skills that were practiced within the intervention for the future.

Zarate et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis study to analyze the use of mindfulness interventions in the emotional well-being of teachers. The research inquiries wanted to determine if mindfulness interventions could be effective in reducing teacher anxiety, stress, and burnout and the overall treatment effects of mindfulness interventions (Zarate et al., 2019). Researchers reviewed intervention frequency, dosage, and techniques (Zarate et al., 2019). There were 18 studies and 1,001 participants with most of the studies split into two segments with a treatment group and a control group (Zarate et al., 2019). All studies had a meditation

component and most interventions in the studies included breathwork, mental exercises, and emotion regulation (Zarate et al., 2019). Zarate et al. (2019) reported that statistically mindfulness-based interventions had positive effects on teacher stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression. Zarate et al. (2019) indicated that future research on mindfulness-based interventions would be to narrow down more specific components of mindfulness.

In a related study using mindfulness, DiCarlo et al. (2019) explored mindfulness for perceived teacher stress and classroom climate. The participants of this study were three early childhood teachers at a campus-based childcare preschool (DiCarlo et al., 2019). DiCarlo et al. (2019) inquired about how mindfulness practices impacted a classroom and if mindfulness practices helped reduce teacher stress. The intervention used a multi-faceted mindfulness intervention which included guided meditation, yoga poses, and intentional breathing (DiCarlo et al., 2019). The results of this study reported that all three participants displayed a positive climate and decreased negative climate using mindfulness practices and two of the three participants had decreased stress after the intervention (DiCarlo et al., 2019). DiCarlo et al. (2019) similar to Zarate et al. (2019) pointed to further studies needing to be done on individual practices of mindfulness in order to determine which elements are most beneficial.

Marques et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study on a program to develop social-emotional competence focused on emotional self-management and self-awareness as a resource for teacher stress and well-being. The study selected 18 teachers who were employed in a Brazilian public school (Marques et al. 2020). Marques et al. (2020) implemented an emotional education program intervention for ten 90-minute meetings. The intervention meetings included breathing and body awareness to help control mental agitation and understand physical sensations and emotions (Marques et al. 2020). Marques et al. (2020) reported that during the

intervention program, teachers become more adept at making a distinction between their feelings and narrowed complaints by finding solutions to their problems. In summary of the findings, Marques et al. (2020) found that teachers improved with emotional self-awareness and were able to perceive, identify, and understand their emotions with less hasty attitudes.

Mindfulness Study Limitations

Mindfulness has become a part of teacher stress reduction. Studies that have reviewed or implemented mindfulness have potential limitations. Norton & Griffith (2020) conducted research on the impact of delivering mindfulness-based programs in schools. This qualitative study involved eight teachers who were trained in the mindfulness “b”-curriculum (short for “Stop, Breathe and Be”) to teach students and needed to practice mindfulness themselves (Norton & Griffith, 2020). Norton & Griffith (2020) reported that teachers thought mindfulness practices helped them have more passion for themselves and their students, and improved their own emotional regulation and stress reduction. The limitations of this study are that a sample of eight participants cannot speak for all staff members (Norton & Griffith, 2020). Another limitation could be a connection to the researchers’ own context because the first author had many years of implementing mindfulness-based programs in a school (Norton & Griffith, 2020). There could also be compassion or rapport with participants when data was collected (Norton & Griffith, 2020).

Bonde et al. (2022) focused a research study on the effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction for teachers. This study was a nested trial within a research project (Bonde et al., 2022). In Denmark, 110 schools participated with three teachers chosen from each school, and teachers that gave consent completed a baseline questionnaire (Bonde et al., 2022). Teachers in the intervention group received an eight week mindfulness-based stress reduction course for

two and a half hours per week along with a seven-hour silent retreat day. (Bonde et al., 2022). The participants were asked to practice mindfulness for at least 60 minutes for six days per week. (Bonde et al., 2022). Bonde et al., (2022) found that there was a small significant effect of teacher stress after participating in the mindfulness program. A limitation of this study was that it was a nested trial within a project so there was not any follow-up on the effects of the mindfulness-based intervention. (Bonde et al., 2022). A limitation of not using an active control group might affect the results of the main trial (Bonde et al., 2022). In addition, teachers that participated might have already been involved with mindfulness-based stress reduction, therefore, might have been more motivated for the study (Bonde et al., 2022).

In research conducted by Garner et al. (2018), 87 participants who were either pre-service teachers or early childhood teachers, or assistants who were not required to have a college degree or certification participated in a study on mindfulness-based SEL (Social Emotional Learning) programming. The control group only received mindfulness-based training and did not receive SEL (Garner et al., 2018). This intervention included breathing awareness meditation training integrated with SEL (Garner et al., 2018). The intervention was six weeks for two hours per week (Garner et al., 2018). Both groups completed the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory with results showing that mindfulness increased for both groups, but increased significantly with the group that received both the mindfulness-based training and the SEL (Garner et al., 2018). Garner et al. (2018) discussed the limitation of having some of the pre-service teachers as early childhood teachers or assistants even though all of them were working toward their undergraduate degrees. Not included in the study were the direct measures of pre-service teachers' interactions with students (Garner et al., 2018). Garner et al. (2018) reported that the intervention was abrupt as another limitation.

Molina et al. (2022) conducted a study that researched the effect of mindfulness, SEL (Social Emotional Learning), and counselor consultation. Participants received five weeks of consultation based on mindfulness and SEL (Molina et al., 2022). There were 30 teachers from middle and high school with 15 in the intervention group and 15 in the control group (Molina et al., 2022). Teachers were given a Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, a Perceived Stress Scale, and a Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Molina et al., 2022). Molina et al. (2022) indicated that the treatment group had growth in acting with awareness which is a mindfulness skill. Participants in the treatment group had lowered teacher-perceived stress whereas the control group remained the same (Molina et al., 2022). Similar to the Bonde et al., 2022 study, Molina et al. (2022) indicated that since participants were volunteers or self-selected, therefore they could have been predisposed to mindfulness and SEL or stressed in a different way. This study was for middle and high school teachers which would not be generalizable to elementary teachers or administrators (Molina et al., 2022). Another limitation could be that this was a self-report intervention so stress and mindfulness experiences may not be fully captured (Molina et al., 2022).

Site Profile

District Characteristics

Newton Community School District is located approximately thirty miles east of Des Moines. The town of Newton has a population of approximately 15,000 with a school enrollment of 2,748 students in Pre-K-12th grades (Newton Community School District, 2023). There are four elementary buildings, one middle school, one high school, and one alternative high school. The students in this school district identify as 82.7% white, 7.3% Hispanic, 3.7% Black, 5.1% Multi-Race, less than 0.3% Native American, 0.7% Asian, and 0.1% Pacific

Islander. Of the students, 45.35 are eligible for free and reduced lunches. Students receiving Special Education Services totaled 15.4%, and 2.9% of students are receiving ELL Services (Iowa Department of Education, 2022). In 2022, the graduation rate was 91.59% and the dropout rate was 2.73% (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

In 2022, new school index scores and rating categories were calculated on the Iowa School Performance website. Newton Senior High School and Woodrow Wilson Elementary had a commendable performance rating. Aurora Heights Elementary and Thomas Jefferson Elementary had an acceptable performance rating. Emerson Hough Elementary and Berg Middle School had a needs improvement performance rating, and West Academy Alternative School had a priority performance rating (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

As a school district, in grades 3-11, Newton had a proficiency percentage in English language arts of 63.61% which was lower than the state's average of 70.84%. The Newton School District scored 60.7% in mathematics which was lower than the state's average of 64.97% (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

District Vision/Mission

The Newton Community School District's mission is "The Newton Community School District empowers every learner to achieve a lifetime of personal success" (NCSD-Homepage, 2023). The district's vision is "We are a collaborative and cohesive team that inspires and supports all learners in a culture of safety and acceptance" (NCSD-Homepage, 2023). The district's core values are honesty, caring, positivity, fun, and support.

School Characteristics

Woodrow Wilson Elementary is one of four elementary buildings in the Newton Community School District. There are 261 students in kindergarten through fourth grade at

Woodrow Wilson Elementary. The low socio-economic status at this school is 42.9%. Students at Woodrow Wilson identified as 87.7% White, 4.2% Hispanic, 4.2% Multi-racial, 1.5% Black, 1.5% Asian, and 0.8% Native American. Students with disabilities (IEP) identified as 14.9%. There are 1.1% English Language Learners. The daily average attendance percentage is 94.8% which is higher than the state average of 92.8% (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

School Student Performance

The Iowa Department of Education reports on scores taken from the ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment for Student Progress). Woodrow Wilson Elementary has an overall performance rating of 59.37% which is a commendable status. Woodrow Wilson Elementary has an English language arts score of 76.24% which is higher than the state average of 70.84%. Woodrow Wilson's mathematics percentage of 78.22% is higher than the state average of 64.97%. The Conditions for Learning composite score for Woodrow Wilson Elementary is 50.57% with the state average score of 49.27%. (Iowa Department of Education, 2022).

The Newton Community School District uses NWEA's (Northwest Evaluation Association) MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) for reading and math proficiency in grades two through four. This assessment is given three times per year in the fall, winter, and spring. In the fall of 2022, Woodrow Wilson Elementary had the following scores for reading proficiency: second grade 72%, third grade 74%, and fourth grade 75%. In the winter of 2023, Woodrow Wilson had the following scores for reading proficiency: second grade 80%, third grade 84%, and fourth grade 79%. In the spring of 2023, Woodrow Wilson had the following reading proficiency scores: second grade 85%, third grade 75%, and fourth grade 74%. Woodrow Wilson Elementary students in 1st-4th grade take MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) for math proficiency. In the fall of 2022, Woodrow Wilson Elementary had the following scores for math

proficiency: first grade 78%, second grade 73 %, third grade 83%, and fourth grade 77%. In the winter of 2023, Woodrow Wilson had the following math proficiency scores: first grade 78%, second grade 79%, third grade 83%, and fourth grade 77%. In the spring of 2023, Woodrow Wilson had the following math proficiency scores: first grade 87%, second grade 80%, third grade 77%, and fourth grade 82%. Woodrow Wilson Elementary had an overall reading proficiency score of 76% and an overall math proficiency score of 82% at the end of the 2023 school year.

Parent Involvement

The Newton Community School District provides a variety of ways for parents to be informed or have volunteer opportunities to be involved in their child's education. Infinite Campus provides access to grades and communication from the district. All schools in the district have their own Facebook page as well as a district Facebook page. Parents have the opportunity to attend parent-teacher conferences twice per year in elementary or once per quarter at the middle and high school levels. Progress reports are provided twice per year, once in the winter and once at the end of the school year. Parents can volunteer in group settings or on field trips. If a parent works with students one-on-one, they must be approved by filling out a background check. Parents are always welcome to join the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and attend school board meetings. Schools communicate through newsletters, flyers, social media outlets, and through teacher e-mails.

Student Learning Goals

Woodrow Wilson Elementary's proficiency goal for ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress) for math and reading was for students to be greater than the 50th percentile for growth in the 2022-2023 school year. Woodrow Wilson made their goal of growth with 58

percentile in English language arts and 59 percentile in mathematics. Each grade level has an RIT (Rasch Unit Scale) band score they need to meet to be proficient when taking the NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) assessment.

Woodrow Wilson Elementary uses standards-based grading to assess students on state standards, and these results are reported on progress reports. On a scale of one to four, a three represents proficiency. Grade-level teachers gather to look at data to create specific grade-level goals.

Curriculum

The Newton Community School District has adopted Eureka Math by Great Minds. Eureka Math focuses on common core standards with a hands-on learning approach. Eureka Math “sets a new standard for rigor, coherence, and focus in the classroom so students gain a deeper understanding of the why behind the numbers, all while making math more enjoyable to learn and teach” (Eureka Math®). The Newton Community School District adopted AmplifyCKLA (Core Knowledge Language Arts) reading curriculum starting in the fall of 2023. Some teachers in the district have been piloting the program during the 2022-2023 school year. “Amplify is dedicated to collaborating with educators to create learning experiences that are rigorous and riveting for all students. “Amplify creates K-12 core and supplemental curriculum, assessment, and intervention programs for today’s students” (Our company Amplify 2022). The Newton Community School District uses Marzano’s Instructional Framework and Marzano’s Proficiency Scales. Along with ISASP (Iowa Statewide Assessment for Student Progress) and NWES’s (Northwest Evaluation Association) MAP (Measure of Academic Progress), the district uses formative and summative assessments that align with the reading and math curriculums.

Professional Development

Newton Community School District has professional development on the last Monday of every month. Teachers are given options to attend sessions in the morning regarding curriculum programs, technology, and behavior instructional approaches. In the afternoon, teachers are required to work within their PLC (Professional Learning Community) on school-wide and grade-level data and instruction.

Needs Assessment

Teacher stress can affect school climate and culture. When teachers do not have an outlet to deal with their stress it can interfere with the work they do and can potentially affect their physical and mental well-being. According to the systematic review Embse et al. (2019), on teacher stress interventions, “High teacher stress has an impact on school outcomes, including links to absenteeism, burnout, school climate, and teacher behavior management” (p. 1328). Teacher stress is being recognized across the country. A national survey of teachers shows that 61% of teachers are stressed out, with 58% describing their mental health as “not good” (Mahnken, 2017). “This translates to lost productivity and ineffectiveness, not to mention healthcare spending in the billions” (Mahnken, 2017, para. 1).

Teacher stress has been recognized at the Newton Community School District which includes Woodrow Wilson Elementary. The Newton Community School District implemented an employee assistance program for stress management, anxiety, and depression. School employees can meet with a counselor in person or have a telehealth counseling session up to six times per year. The number of employees utilizing this service has been low. According to the utilization report from EFR Employee and Family Resources, from July 1, 2022, through March 31, 2023, only seven employees out of approximately 450 employees have used this service

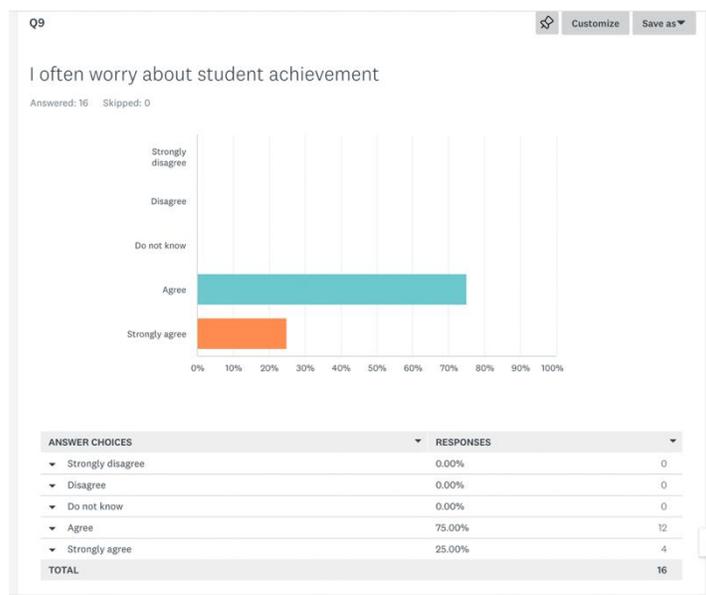
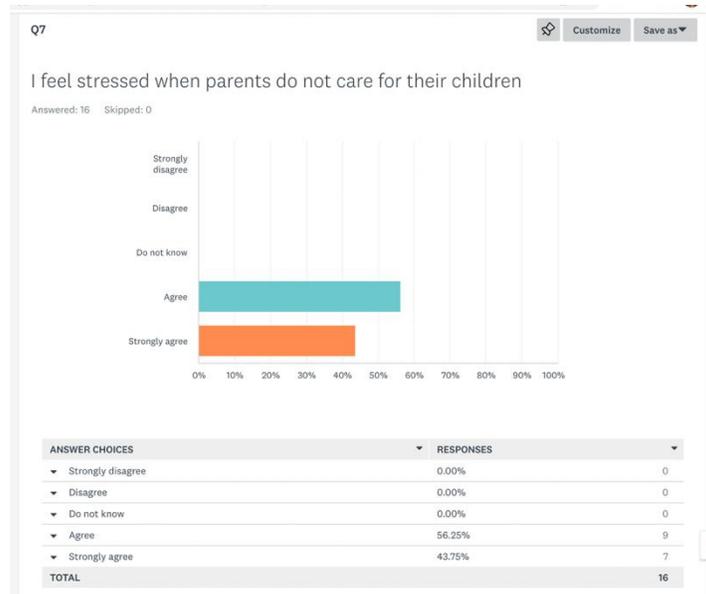
(EFR, Mental Health Update, 2023). Those seven employees may not even be teachers since this service is open to all district staff.

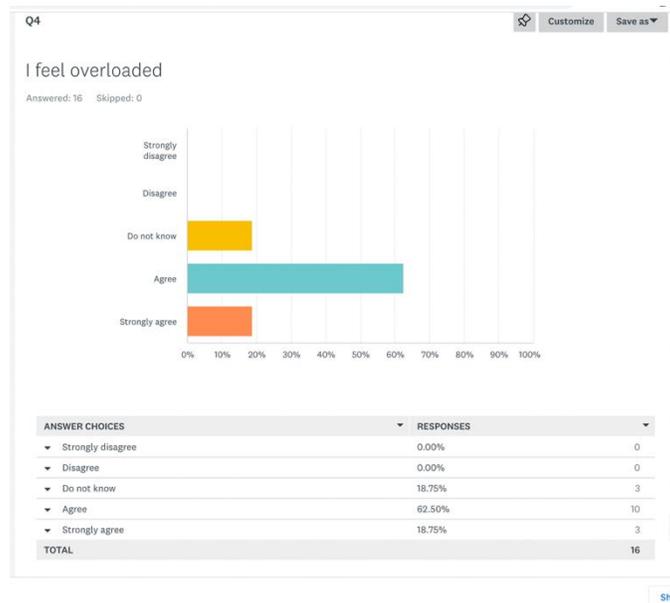
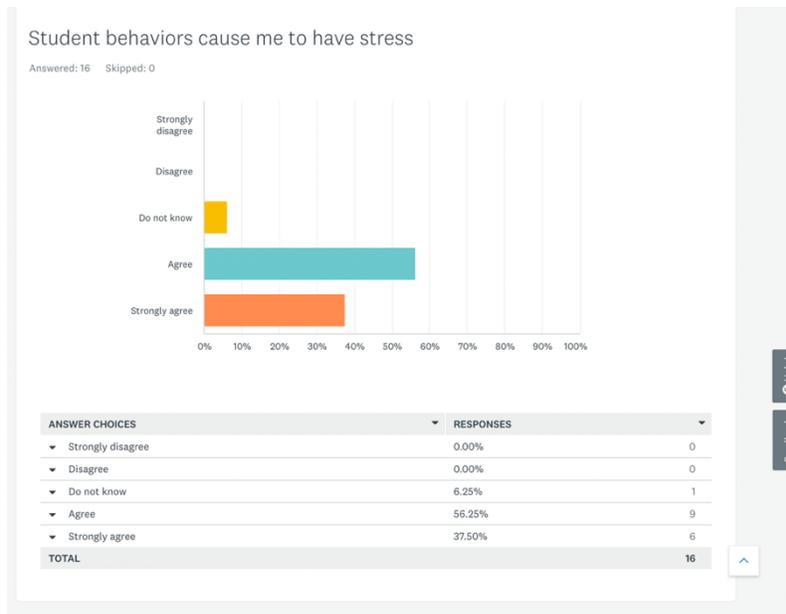
Teachers may feel less threatened or intimidated when dealing with the everyday stress they experience if they could find ways to deal with stress themselves. Implementing mindfulness exercises can be a successful way for teachers to handle the stress they experience. Mindfulness exercise interventions can help teachers engage in targeting present-moment awareness in a non-reactive manner, associating their own experience and that of others with calmness, patience, and grace (Greenberg, 2016). “Skills are taught using sequenced exercises such as body scans, breath awareness, meditative movement, greater emotional awareness, and the cultivation of positive emotions towards self and others” (Greenberg, 2016, p. 8). Studies have suggested that mindfulness exercises can help reduce stress. Woodrow Wilson teachers can benefit from practicing mindfulness exercises to help reduce teacher stress.

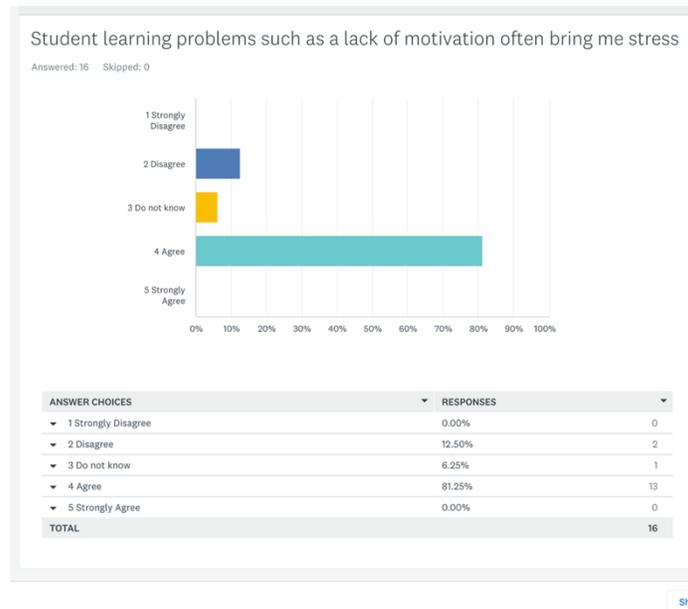
Data Analysis

Data is an important part of determining if there is a problem, discovering how to go about fixing the problem, and verifying if a solution worked for the problem. Currently, there are 23 teachers employed at Woodrow Wilson Elementary. A teacher stress survey was given to the 23 teachers employed at Woodrow Wilson Elementary and 16 teachers or 70% replied to the survey. The teacher stress survey questions were generated by Erdenesaikhan Gandolgor, Comparative Educationist, Primary English teacher at Orchlon Cambridge International School. This survey gives insight into particular items that cause more or less teacher stress. The data in the survey indicates that teachers at Woodrow Wilson Elementary are experiencing teacher stress. There were ten questions asked on the survey using a scale of 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-do not know, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree.

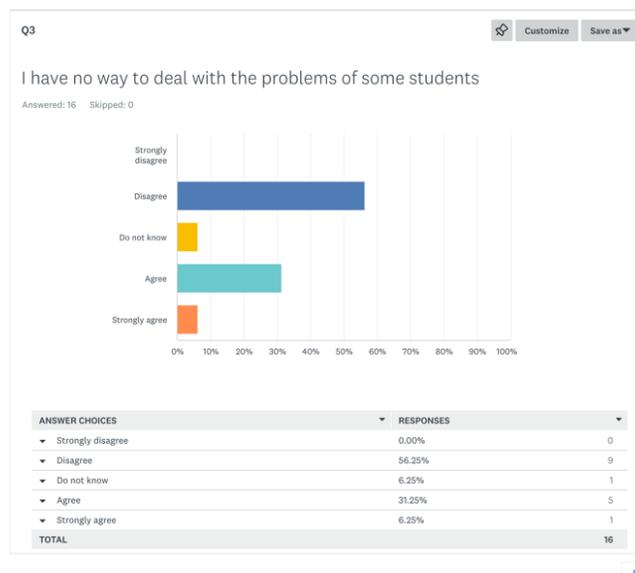
The top stressors are indicated by agree or strongly agree. Woodrow Wilson Elementary teachers indicated that the top stressors they experience are worrying about when parents do not care for their children at 100%, student achievement at 100%, student behavior at 93.75%, work overload at 81.25% and student learning problems such as lack of motivation at 81.25%. The following bar graphs demonstrate in percentages the items that cause higher stress.

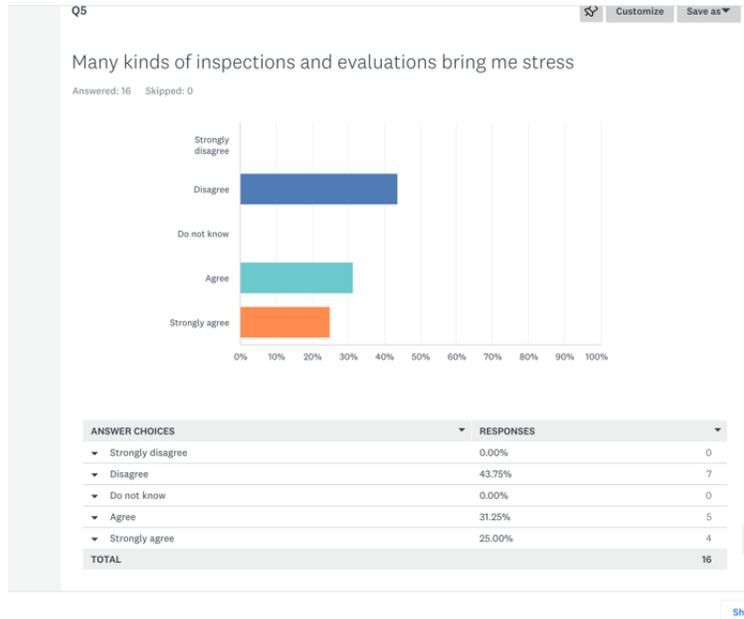




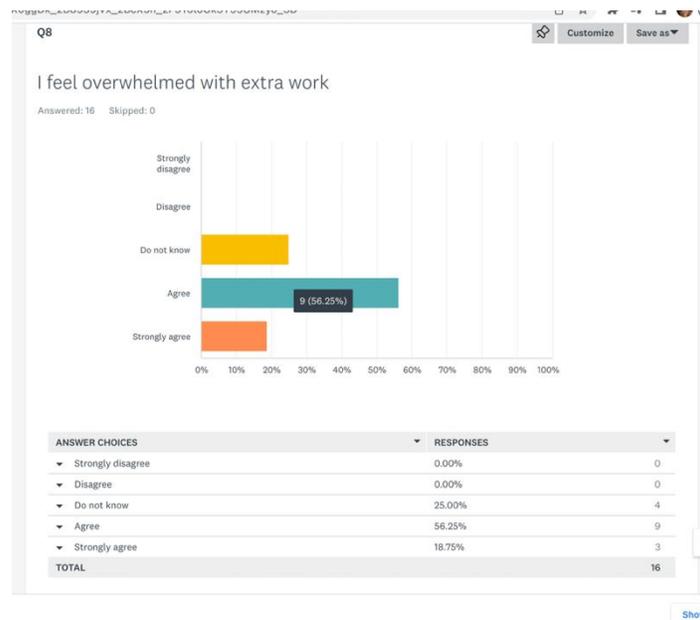


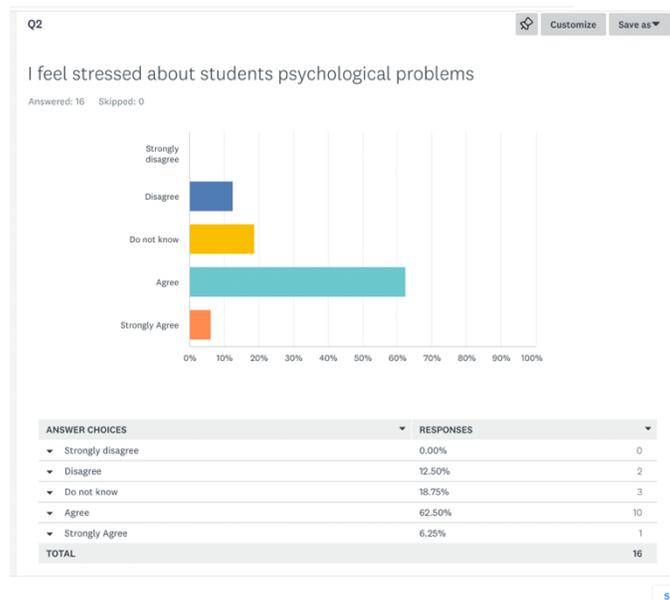
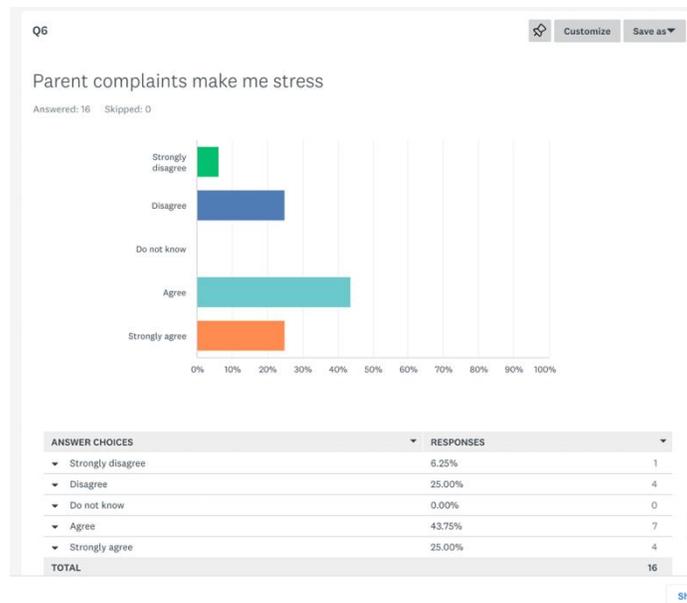
The item that caused the least amount of stress for Woodrow Wilson Elementary teachers at 56.25%, was “I have no way to deal with the problems of some students.” This data points out a strength of teachers finding ways to deal with the problems of some students; however, 37.5% indicated that this item does cause them stress by agreeing or strongly agreeing. The other item on the survey that is close to being equal is “many kinds of inspections and evaluations bring me stress” which indicates that it may bring teacher stress. The bar graphs below indicate the two items that bring lower stress to some of the teachers at Woodrow Wilson Elementary.





Other items that cause some stresses were extra work at 75%, parent complaints at 68.75%, and dealing with student psychological problems at 68.75%.





The data from the stress survey indicates that teachers are feeling stressed from the answers they gave in the survey. Some stressors may be more prevalent than others.

Although not proven in this school improvement plan to be caused by stress, teacher retention can be affected by teacher stress. Even though teachers at Woodrow Wilson Elementary have answered that there are items that cause them stress, as an institution, Woodrow

Wilson Elementary's retention rate is at 88% compared to the state average of 82.3% (Iowa Department of Education, 2022). This would be considered an area of strength for Woodrow Wilson Elementary.

Future data would include the teacher survey for district staff at the end of the school year, which was not yet available during the compilation of this school improvement plan. This survey would have data on other teacher stress issues within the Newton Community School District.

Action Plan

Strategies

In previous studies that have been conducted on teacher stress, there have been different strategies and interventions used to help reduce teacher stress. One such strategy is mindfulness-based stress reduction. Mindfulness is an awareness of the current situation which includes focusing on feelings and sensations while cultivating a nonjudgmental stance of the present experience (Norton & Griffith, 2020). Mindfulness exercises may include breath awareness, meditation, body scans, and the promotion of positive emotions toward self and others (Greenberg et al., 2016). According to Sheinman et al. (2018), mindfulness training and exercises with teachers and students have become widely accepted in educational settings. Similar to the study done by Sheinman et al. (2018), Embse et al., (2019) suggested that based on their findings, mindfulness-based approaches are a more recent trend in incorporating physiological and cognitive reactions to stress.

In a study conducted by Norton & Griffith (2020), after receiving mindfulness training themselves and then delivering a mindfulness-based program to students, teachers felt that their work lives became more authentic, and compassionate, and they themselves were more present

with others. DiCarlo et al. (2019) implemented a multifaceted mindfulness-based intervention that included mindfulness practices such as intentional breathing, yoga, and guided meditation throughout different times of the day. The study produced results that showed teachers exhibited a higher positive climate and lower negative climate along with a perceived change in stress scores (DiCarlo et al., 2019). In a systematic review of teacher stress interventions, eight studies using mindfulness-based studies were examined. These studies using mindfulness had a common component of behavioral practice or strategies that can physically calm or relax the body (Embse et al., 2019).

Lensen et al. (2021) conducted a study with a mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention that consisted of eight weekly group sessions each lasting 120 minutes. Intervention components involved formal and informal meditation exercises such as meditation and yoga, dialogue, and education on stress and stress responses (Lensen et al., 2021). A strength of this study was a follow-up on the effect of the intervention after three months which indicated that a mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention can increase the personal resilience and professional development of teachers (Lensen et al., 2021).

Steps to Solve the Problem

Woodrow Wilson Elementary teachers could benefit from mindfulness training exercises to help reduce teacher stress. A mindfulness-based exercise training with twelve modules will be implemented with before and after teacher stress survey results to identify if the intervention proves successful.

Step one -Present pre-stress survey	Given to all teachers
Step two -Introduce the goals and objective of the training workshop and give a timeline to complete the training	Pass out materials. All materials will be put into a notebook organized by modules with a calendar for assigned modules
Step three -Provide access to all of the PowerPoint information that coincides with	This will be put on a school-shared drive

the training materials	
Step four -Present modules at monthly staff meeting	Two modules will be introduced and explained each month
Step five - After training has started, set up one PLC (Professional Learning Communities) day per month to check in with grade-level groups	Grade-level groups will meet weekly during PLC time, and this time will be used for questions about the program.
Step six -Present post-stress survey	Given to all teachers after completion of the training workshop

Implementation of School Improvement Plan

The Improving Mindfulness training materials will be implemented over the course of six months from October through March. Improving Mindfulness materials are provided by Corporate Training Materials, a division of Global Courseware. According to Corporate Training Improving Mindfulness (2023, para. 1), “Participants will become more mindful of their actions and learn how to express and interpret their present environment. “They will create positive connections and increase their self-regulation of attention and personal experiences” (Corporate Training Improving Mindfulness, 2023, para. 1). There are twelve modules in this training, and two modules will be completed per month. A teacher stress survey will be given in September before training starts and a post-stress survey will be given in April after the training has been completed. Each training will start with a fifteen-minute introduction to the modules and a quick overview of what to expect during monthly staff meetings. All modules will be self-paced during each month and discussion groups will take place for fifteen minutes during PLC (Professional Learning Communities) time each Monday with grade-level teams.

<p>September 2023-Pre-Stress Survey</p> <p>October 2023 Module One: Getting Started</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housekeeping Items 	<p>January 2024 Module Seven: Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Modes • Doing Mode
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-Assignment Review • Workshop Objectives • The Parking Lot • Action Plan <p>Module Two: What is Mindfulness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buddhist Concept • Bare Attention • Memory • Psychological Concept • Case Study • Module Two: Review Questions <p>November 2023</p> <p>Module Three: Practicing Mindfulness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness Meditation • Attention • Acceptance • Scanning • Case Study • Module Three: Review Questions <p>Module Four: Emotional IQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose of Emotions • Performance Emotions • Swing Emotions • Blue Emotions • Case Study • Module Four: Review Questions <p>December 2023</p> <p>Module Five: Cognitive Distortion I</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dichotomous Reasoning • Magnification and Minimization • Filtering (Including Disqualifying) • Jumping to Conclusions • Case Study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being Mode • Metacognitive Awareness • Case Study • Module Seven: Review Questions <p>Module Eight: Mindfulness and Gratitude</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is Gratitude? • Gratitude Journal • Gratitude Exercise • How to Form a Habit • Case Study • Module Eight: Review Questions <p>February 2024</p> <p>Module Nine: Cultivating High Performance Emotions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotion-Cognition-Behavior Triangle • Cultivating Enthusiasm • Cultivating Confidence • Cultivating Tenacity • Case Study • Module Nine: Review Questions <p>Module Ten: Mindfulness and Customer Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually Focused • Active Listening • Building a Rapport • Timing • Case Study • Module Ten: Review Questions <p>March 2024</p> <p>Module Eleven: Mindfulness and Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Resilience • Focus
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Five: Review Questions <p>Module Six: Cognitive Distortion II</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destructive Labelling • Personalizing • Blaming • The Tyranny of the Should • Case Study • Module Six: Review Questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassion • Creativity <p>Case Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Module Eleven: Review Questions <p>Module Twelve: Wrapping Up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Words from the Wise • Review of the Parking Lot • Lessons Learned • Recommended Reading • Completion of Action Plans and Evaluations <p>April 2024 Post-Stress Survey</p>
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Once the school administrator approves this training, an educator with the help of the school instructional coach will implement the mindfulness modules by introducing them at each monthly staff meeting and attending grade-level PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) once per month for questions and needs with the modules. The educator and school instructional coach will work together to provide any support regarding the modules and training in order to help deter the failure of the program.

In order to determine if this program is successful in helping teachers reduce stress, the post-stress survey will show results in stress reduction. The following questions would be administered in the teacher stress pre and post-survey. The post-stress survey will also have a reflection section asking if the training and modules were helpful using the one-five scale, and a writing section on how the training will be utilized in the future.

<p>Scales that will be used:</p> <p>1 Strongly Disagree</p> <p>2 Disagree</p> <p>3 Do not know</p>
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4 Agree
5 Strongly Agree

1. Student learning problems such as a lack of motivation often bring me stress
2. I feel stressed about students' psychological problems
3. I have no way to deal with the problems of some students
4. I feel overloaded
5. Many kinds of inspections and evaluations bring me stress
6. Parent complaints mak me stress
7. I feel stressed when parents do not care for their children
8. I feel overwhelmed with extra work
9. I often worry about student achievement
10. Student behaviors cause me to have stress

A barrier and challenge to utilizing the training with the modules is that is it self-paced. Teachers will need to be disciplined in order to be timely in completing the modules. Teachers will need to do the work in order to have meaningful conversations with their grade-level teams. Teachers may not be motivated to do any extra work outside of school work. Teachers may not be interested in finding uses for the training and the modules.

Conclusion

After reviewing several research studies on teacher stress, it is apparent that there is a current prevalence and a need to find ways for teachers to deal with stress. Studies have shown that teacher stress can correlate to employee absenteeism, student success, mental and physical health concerns, and the overall climate in a classroom (Embse et al., 2019). Studies have been done on how to combat teacher stress, and there have been different strategies and interventions used in research studies that have proven to be successful. One of the strategies used in helping alleviate teacher stress is mindfulness-based stress reduction.

The impact of utilizing mindfulness exercises in educational settings for teachers can help with reducing burnout, anxiety, depression, and stress-related illnesses (Norton & Griffith,

2020). When implementing mindfulness practice interventions throughout teachers' daily routines, the positive climate increase and the negative climate decreased (DiCarlo et al., 2019).

In literature summarized by Hwang et al. (2017), teachers who found ways to cope with stress and emotions, were more aware of their experiences, had positive ways to handle challenges, and had more clarity of mind after implementing mindfulness. Mindfulness exercises can be used as a strategy and intervention when teachers have stress in their lives. Past research has indicated that it can be a successful coping mechanism.

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