Mindful Classroom: Developing and Testing Strategies for Resilience among Urban 7th Grade Students

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Mindful Classroom:
Developing and Testing Strategies for Resilience among Urban 7th Grade Students

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Abstract

Introduction: A growing body of research suggests mindfulness-based classroom interventions are an effective, low cost approach to reducing the effects of toxic stress among youth. The purpose of this project was to identify key sources of stress among urban 7th grade students at De Marillac Academy and develop and test mindfulness techniques to actively engage and potentially improve stress management skills among students.

Methods: Five focus groups with students were conducted to assess the most prominent sources of stress inside and outside of school as well as current self-management strategies. Additionally, anonymous online surveys were distributed to 7th grade parents, faculty, and staff to determine perceived sources of stress and areas for student growth. Based on findings, a nine-week series of mindfulness activities was piloted in the classroom for 30 minutes each week. Activities were designed to encourage motivation, self-awareness, positive decision making, and stress management. Students completed a feedback survey after five and nine weeks.

Results: Academic achievement, staying focused in class, and family problems were identified as the three primary sources of stress. Students responded best to activities that encouraged a space for calm and quiet, interactive learning, and clear explanations. After nine weeks, although some students experienced challenges staying focused and still, most students could accurately describe mindfulness and identify a mindful practice to employ when stressed.

Discussion: The results suggest promising strategies for teaching and engaging urban, low-income students in mindfulness. Future research is recommended to evaluate long-term student behavioral outcomes from mindfulness activities.

Keywords: Adolescents, Mindfulness, Toxic Stress, School-Based Health Interventions
Executive Summary

De Marillac Academy’s 7th grade students experience significant challenges related to attentiveness, fatigue, disruptive behavior, and academic achievement. Compared to other grades, the 7th grade class experienced the highest number of disciplinary incidents in the past school year. External factors related to low socioeconomic status, family hardships, and limited access to resources are known contributing factors that increase risk of toxic stress, manifesting in poor classroom conduct. This pilot program aimed to identify students’ key sources of stress and examine which mindfulness techniques actively engage and potentially improve stress management skills among urban 7th grade students.

To determine the most prominent sources of stress for students both inside and outside of school and to assess student’s self-management strategies, all 23 7th grade students participated in focus groups of four or five students each. Each 30-40-minute focus group consisted of a brief six-question survey, open ended questions, card sorting exercises, and a “vote with your feet” activity. Additionally, a 12-question anonymous online survey was distributed to the 7th grade team of teachers and staff members who have direct contact with 7th grade students. A similar anonymous 13-question survey was electronically distributed to 7th grade parents and guardians with an option to complete the survey in either English or Spanish.

All three sources of data indicated that stress plays a salient role in the lives of De Marillac’s 7th grade students. In their responses, students expressed a strong awareness of stress and its impacts on daily functioning as well as a desire to learn how to reduce stress and improve learning. In line with previous research linking family- and neighborhood-related stressors to behavioral and academic outcomes, students identified academic achievement, staying focused in class, and family problems as interrelated primary stressors. These themes were also observed as
areas of difficulty for students by parents, faculty, and staff participants. Additionally, four themes including motivation, self-awareness, positive decision making, and stress management emerged as key target areas to improve challenging behaviors and resilience. Based on these findings, a mindfulness-based pilot program was developed and facilitated for 30 minutes per week over the course of nine weeks. Weekly themes included activities that foster mindful listening, seeing, tasting, moving, choices, and gratitude. Additionally, each session opened and closed with meditative silence facilitated by a bell and breathing exercise.

Aligned with the finding that noise in the classroom and difficulty focusing in class contributed to student stress, a majority of the class embraced opportunities for quiet meditation and reflection such as listening to the ring of a singing bowl or journaling. Similarly, students rejected activities that were loud or chaotic. Furthermore, students found interactive, stimulating activities most engaging and helpful. Although some students still struggled with focus and stillness, at the end of nine weeks almost every student was able to define mindfulness and identify a strategy for mindful practice in a stressful situation.

Embedding mindfulness into De Marillac’s school culture, including staff development days, and expanding the program to implement preventative mindfulness-based practices in lower grade levels is recommended. Evaluation of the mindfulness program’s success at De Marillac Academy is also recommended to assess program effectiveness on student behavioral outcomes over time.

**Literature Review**

**Introduction**

Low-income urban youth in the United States experience a disproportionately high risk of long-term health issues as a result of extreme environmental stressors and exposure to trauma
(Burke, Hellman, Scott, Weems, & Carrion, 2011). A growing literature on the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) reveals a strong connection between socio-environmental factors, prolonged exposure to stress, and healthy physical, mental, and social development. To understand this relationship, we must first understand the term “toxic stress.”

**Toxic Stress and Developmental Outcomes**

Beginning at a young age, our bodies develop a natural stress response system to cope with perceived threats and is indicated by physical changes in the body such as increased heart rate and release of stress hormones; however, continuous and pervasive exposure to adversity can disrupt our natural stress response system (Center on Developing Child, 2007). Unlike positive stress, toxic stress disrupts a person’s normal stress response regulation, causing stress hormones to become excessive or deficient (Bucci, Marques, Oh, & Harris, 2016). According to Bucci et al. (2016) toxic stress in children is not only developmentally harmful to learning positive coping skills in response to challenges, but exposure to a highly stressful environment has critical implications for the growing brain including the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. These systems, when not functioning properly, can have long-term cardiovascular, autoimmune, cognitive, and behavioral consequences (Bucci et al., 2016).

The long-term health impacts of ACEs were first examined in the commonly cited ACE Study by Felitti et al. in 1998. Researchers found that adult participants who reported one or more ACE were more likely to experience a number of health and behavioral problems later in life including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and substance abuse (Bucci et al., 2016; Felitti et al., 1998; Wade, Shea, Rubin, & Wood, 2014). Further research has found additional links between childhood trauma and academic challenges, incarceration, poverty, and decreased life
expectancy (Wade et al., 2014). These studies indicate the potent effect of social determinants of health early in life.

**Risk Factors and Social Determinants of Health**

The definition of ACEs varies slightly across the literature. The Center on the Developing Child (2007) identifies poverty, abuse, neglect, peripheral violence, and parental mental and behavioral problems as common predictors of toxic stress. One study by Wade et al. (2014) aimed to gain insight into perceived stressors by youth in low-income urban communities in Philadelphia. Findings revealed that family-related problems were the top sources of stress among this community including substance abuse, death and illness, single-parent challenges, and violence in the home. Neighborhood and community factors were the second most commonly identified source of stress as many participants described the impact of unsafe communities on their personal and interpersonal daily functioning (Wade et al., 2014). These findings are significant given at least 20% children in the United States live in poverty; these odds increase to 30% for Latino and African American children (Jutte, Miller, & Erickson, 2015). In San Francisco, one primary care pediatric clinic in a low-income urban neighborhood found that 67% of patients reported at least one ACE and 12% reported four or more ACEs (Burke et al., 2011). Founding clinician Dr. Nadine Burke Harris primarily serves low-income Latino families in the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood and now integrates social histories of trauma and toxic stress screenings into standard pediatric care (Chandler, 2016). Because children in low-income, urban communities are at higher risk of prolonged toxic stress and childhood adversity, efforts to increase protective factors among this population are imperative to long-term health outcomes and life success.
Protective Factors

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports that by the seventh grade, over 40% of American adolescents experience a behavioral health problem (SAMHSA, 2016). Low socioeconomic status increases risk for mental disorders due to low access to resources that improve health and high exposure to toxic stress (Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). To combat the dangerous risks of toxic stress and build or repair an effective stress response system, resilience is a key protective factor for positive youth development (Bucci et al., 2016). Experts identify social and emotional growth as fundamental to positive development in children (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). These skills build resiliency among youth by helping them effectively manage emotions, build positive relationships with peers, and make responsible decisions. Therefore, social and emotional learning helps protect children against developing serious mental health problems and associated risks later in life.

Kendziora and Osher (2016) also note that these findings appear consistent across diverse ages and backgrounds. Additionally, an emotionally supportive environment, including caregiver support and functional neighborhood communities, are crucial protective factors. The Center on the Developing Child (2007) reports that “providing supportive, responsive relationships as early in life as possible can prevent or reverse the damaging effects of toxic stress.”

Responding to Toxic Stress with School-Based Mindfulness

In response to the growing need for social and emotional development among urban low-income youth, schools are an ideal intervention point to provide cost-effective preventative services and tools for growth that might not be accessed in external settings (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). According to Zenner et al. (2014), Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) are becoming increasingly accepted practices in schools to aid in developing skills for
resilience including emotional management, attentiveness, empathy, and problem solving; ultimately, these interventions are designed to equip children with the capacity to successfully respond to challenging, stressful situations in life. A systematic review of meditation programs by Goyal, Singh, and Sibinga (2014) found that across 47 randomized control trials with over 3,500 participants, mindfulness meditation had small to moderate impact on improved anxiety, depression, pain, and stress.

In popular culture, one Baltimore school has gained viral attention for its “Mindful Moment Room” which replaced detention with mindful meditation exercises (Bloom, 2016). In an urban community where many students experience homelessness, poverty, and violence, the Mindful Moment Room intervention allows students to practice deep breathing and yoga in a safe space. The school principal notes that there have been zero suspensions since the program’s implementation, suggesting a reduction in disciplinary incidents. In a separate New York City high school where a majority of students are affected by adversity and poverty, mindfulness is being used to promote emotional regulation and academic success (Davis, 2015). Davis (2015) describes the growing popularity of mindfulness in schools as a result of progressive education reformers who highlight the significant effect of emotional imbalance on long-term life outcomes.

**Evidence-Based Interventions**

Multiple studies have examined individual MBIs to determine the efficacy of this approach in managing toxic stress in at-risk youth. One randomized control trial examined the effectiveness of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program on stress and trauma among low-income, urban middle school youth in Baltimore (Sibinga, Webb, Ghazarian, & Ellen, 2015). The rationale for this study includes the high-risk of trauma and toxic stress among
the target population. Sibinga et al. (2015) collaborated with Elev8 Baltimore, a nonprofit organization that aims to connect students and families to valuable school-based resources, to implement a 12-week MBSR program among 300 students in two middle schools. Key results of this study include improved psychological symptoms and emotional coping among MBSR participants as well as reduced posttraumatic symptoms, depressive symptoms, negative mood, and self-hostility. The findings suggest that MBSR is a promising approach to treating toxic stress among youth and supporting positive coping skill development. Further research is needed to determine psychological, social, and behavioral outcomes as well as which instruction methods are most effective.

Another randomized control trial examined MindUP, a cost-effective, mindfulness-based social and emotional learning intervention consisting of in-class lessons, daily mindfulness exercises, and community building activities designed to improve skills such as self-management and empathy among students (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). The program curriculum is rooted in research suggesting that SEL skills enhance resilience in response to stress and increase well-being, academic achievement, and long-term success. In a randomized control trial, the intervention group displayed better SEL skills (including empathy, emotional control, and optimism) and academic achievement than the control group. MindUP participants showed a 15% improvement in math, 20% improvement in self-reported well-being, 24% improvement in positive social behaviors, and 24% reduction in aggressive behaviors. Teachers reported near-perfect fidelity in administering lessons and daily breathing exercises. In terms of practice implications, these findings reveal that a simple-to-administer intervention allows teachers to deliver consistently. One limitation to this study is the small sample size (99 fourth and fifth grade students and 2 teachers). It is unclear whether the intervention will be as effective when
implemented on a larger, more diverse scale. While further research should address these limitations, MindUP demonstrates a promising, cost-effective model for school-based SEL curriculum.

Finally, a rigorous program evaluation of the Oakland-based Mindful Schools program, conducted by the University of California at Davis, yielded promising results around the efficacy and sustainability of an in-class MBI (Smith, Guzman-Alvarez, Westover, Keller, & Fuller, 2012). Over the course of one school year, 937 students and 47 teachers across three public elementary schools in Oakland participated in a randomized control study. The Mindful Schools program offers 15 in-class lessons administered to students, a curriculum training administered to teachers, and weekly booster sessions administered in-class for six weeks. Among students, the intervention group showed statistically significant growth in attentiveness and class participation compared to the control group after four hours of mindfulness lessons. These improvements were higher in male students. Teachers also reported improvements in observed student behavior as well as personal stress management and awareness. 93% of teachers who participated expressed interest in continuing the program including ongoing training for both students and teachers.

**Areas for Future Research**

While the literature shows promising evidence for MBIs among low-income, urban youth to manage stress and related risk factors, further research is still needed in this area of study. Although many studies have shown the positive effects of MBIs in reducing negative outcomes related to ACEs and toxic stress, future studies will determine whether this approach supports increased positive behaviors and which components of MBIs are most effective (Goyal et al., 2014; Sibinga et al., 2015). Additionally, more information is needed about the long-term,
sustainable impacts of developed self-management skills as a result of MBIs. According to Davis (2015) continued research is needed to determine effects of MBIs on long-term academic achievement to justify “mindfulness as an educational tool.” The literature can also be expanded to include a more universal definition of childhood adversity (Wade et al., 2014). Furthermore, future studies in the area of neuroscience should explore resilience and other protective factors in prevention and reversal of damaged stress response systems in children (Bucci et al., 2016).

**Agency Background**

De Marillac Academy is a private, Catholic grade school located in the heart of San Francisco’s Tenderloin neighborhood. The institution, an affiliate of the Daughters of Charity and De La Salle Christian Brothers, was founded in 2001 to offer tuition-free education and instill positive values among youth in the Tenderloin and other low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco. De Marillac’s educational approach is influenced by the Nativity Miguel school movement, a response to New York City’s inadequate public education, costly private education, and limited access to schools in underserved neighborhoods in the 1970s. This network of 46 school across the United States aims to provide a faith-based education and bridge gaps in achievement among underserved students.

De Marillac is the only middle school located in the Tenderloin, a neighborhood with a higher concentration of children per square mile than in all of San Francisco (Cancino et al., 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2010). Aligned with the faith traditions of the Daughters of Charity and De La Salle Christian brothers, De Marillac’s mission is to provide “a life-changing, accessible Catholic educational experience for the underserved children, youth and families of the Tenderloin and surrounding communities.” The De Marillac community practices six virtues, rooted in Catholic tradition, that comprise the schoolwide learning expectations: responsibility,
compassion, gratitude, perseverance, leadership, and integrity. De Marillac invites students of all faith and cultural backgrounds to partake in opportunities for academic and life-long success regardless of socioeconomic status. The school currently serves 119 students in grades 4 through 8, 231 alumni in high school and college, and over 230 families. The current student population is comprised primarily of Latino, Asian / Pacific Islander, and African American youth from the Tenderloin, South of Market, Mission, and other low income neighborhoods.

In addition to a tuition-free education, De Marillac offers programming and resources to support students and families with a holistic approach to success. In school, De Marillac offers small classroom sizes of roughly 12 students per teacher, all of whom are credentialed and experienced. Local community partners from the University of San Francisco, St. Mary’s College, and California Pacific Medical Center are also available on-site, providing individual counseling to support students with a variety of needs including behavioral issues, peer conflicts, and other stressors. Roughly 60% of the student population receives weekly counseling at school. Proactive interventions are also encouraged through weekly class meetings that invite students to voice concerns and affirmations to their class. Additionally, a specialized Care Council team meets weekly to discuss specific students’ academic needs and support plans. Resource specialists, tutors, and volunteers are also key assets in providing academic support and a variety of afterschool enrichment classes for students.

Opportunities for family engagement in student success are encouraged through mandatory monthly family meetings, home visits for new and prospective students, and an organized Family Council to better reach and serve De Marillac Families. By coordinating supportive community resources and partnerships, De Marillac’s Director of Student and Family Services works with families to reduce barriers to student health and success such as housing,
financial, and employment stability. Furthermore, The Graduate Support Program offers support to De Marillac graduates in high school and college seeking support in areas such as financial aid assistance, academic support, and post-secondary or career advising.

As a result of a robust program offering and unique educational model, 91% of De Marillac students graduate high school compared to the 82% San Francisco Unified School District average. In order to sustain tuition-free education and supportive programming, De Marillac is primarily funded by donations from private foundations, corporations, and individuals. The school hosts an Annual Scholarship Benefit, Neighborhood Night, “Triviaoke,” and Back-to-School Reception to celebrate the community, foster new partnerships, and raise funds for student and graduate needs. Through these funding sources, each student at De Marillac received a full $15,000 scholarship each year and full institutional operating funds are secured.

Problem Statement, Target Population, and Goals

According to faculty and staff, De Marillac Academy’s 7th grade students struggle with attentiveness, fatigue, disruptive behavior, and academic achievement. Compared to other grades, the 7th grade class has experienced the highest number of disciplinary incidents this school year. School records show that while all other grades averaged 12 Wait-Thinks Plans (a protocol for documenting and addressing individual student disciplinary incidents) per class from August 2016 through early March 2017, the 7th grade class produced 40 Wait-Thinks Plans within this time frame.

Existing literature shows external factors related to low socioeconomic status, family hardships, and limited access to resources contribute to increased risk of toxic stress, potentially manifesting in poor classroom conduct. As most De Marillac students are exposed to adverse
neighborhood elements of the Tenderloin and familial-based challenges, they are likely vulnerable to toxic stress and related problems. Because over 40% of American adolescents experience a behavioral health problem by 7th grade, tailoring a pilot intervention for De Marillac’s 7th grade class is even more imperative to students’ long-term health outcomes (SAMHSA, 2016). In order to improve 7th grade students’ self-management skills and build resilience in response to environmental stress, this project aims to first assess sources of students’ stress within and outside of school as well as current coping practices. The second goal of this project is to develop and test a series of evidence-based mindfulness activities adapted for De Marillac’s 7th grade class to actively engage students and potentially improve stress management skills. Upon project completion, 95% of 7th grade students will be able to identify and employ at least one mindfulness-based self-management strategy during a stressful situation.

**Needs Assessment Methods**

**Questions and Aims**

The needs assessment was designed to assess stress and resilience among De Marillac Academy’s 7th grade students by answering the following questions:

- What sources of stress are impacting students both inside and outside of school?
- What tools and coping practices do students currently employ to manage stress?
- What key self-management strengths and areas for growth do students display?

**Data Collection Tools**

In order to determine the answers to my assessment questions, I developed three data collection tools. School staff, including my preceptor and the Assistant Principal, were also consulted to ensure questions and language were appropriate for the target populations. The first tool was a student focus group guide (Appendix A) and six-question survey (Appendix B). Some
student survey and focus group questions were adapted from three validated scales (Appendix C): The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28), the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAASC) modified for children, and the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). These scales were referenced to ensure questions captured specific factors related to youth resilience and mindful behaviors. The handwritten pre-focus group survey included six questions rated on a four-point likert-scale including, “How many days last week did you feel stressed at school?” “How often do you have a hard time focusing in class?” and “How often do you find yourself worrying about things?”

I selected focus groups as the primary method of capturing self-reported student experiences of daily stressors and related behavioral outcomes, both inside and outside of school. The focus group guide was designed to be completed within 30-minute time periods that students are available for participation during the school day: Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) in the morning and Homework Support time in the afternoon. Each focus group began with open questions to create a space for students to describe the 7th grade experience and general feelings of stress in their bodies. These questions were then followed by a two-part card activity. In the first portion, students were given a set of cards listing potential in-school stressors such as understanding the lesson, noise in the classroom, and taking tests and quizzes. The students were then instructed to work as a team to identify their top three stressors experienced in school. Follow-up discussion questions asked why students selected these cards, how they manage stress in these situations, and whether any factors were missing from the card selection. The activity was then repeated with a new card set describing stressors outside of school. The card activity was designed to engage students in thinking about specific experiences of stress in daily life; the cards served as thought-starters for students to react to. This activity also allowed the facilitator
to observe how students behave in a team setting. Lastly, students were asked to participate in a “vote with your feet” activity. The facilitator listed a series of positive coping skills such as “I ask for help when I need it” and “I take deep breaths to calm down,” and students were asked to physically move to an area of the room according to how they self-identified with the skills: strength, area for growth, or unsure. This activity was designed to bring awareness of students’ individual strengths and areas for growth.

Additionally, two electronic surveys were developed in order to capture observations of students’ needs, strengths, and areas for growth. The first survey (Appendix D) was developed for faculty and staff who have direct contact with 7th grade students and consisted of 12 items. This survey was anonymous and captured demographic information including the participant’s role at De Marillac academy, gender, and number of years employed at the school. Subsequent questions were modeled closely after the student focus group questions in order to ensure data consistency when analyzing and comparing responses. Questions included “How many of your students display positive coping skills in response to stress? (For example deep breaths, seeking help from an adult, optimistic reframing),” “What do you perceive as sources of stress for your students while at school?” and “Which of the following skills or strengths would be most helpful to your students’ academic and life success?” Two optional open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to evoke additional comments about students’ behavioral needs and strategies implemented with the students in the classroom or other school setting.

The second survey (Appendix E) was developed for 7th grade students’ parent or guardian and consisted of 13 items. Responses from this survey were also anonymous and demographic information captured age, gender, ethnicity, number of children in the household, and number of children who currently or previously attended De Marillac Academy. Surveys in
English and Spanish were available due to the high number of Spanish-speaking families in the school. Questions were slightly modified from the faculty and staff survey for this audience, such as “How would you describe your child’s coping skills in response to stress?” This survey also included two optional open-ended questions for families to describe additional behavioral or social-emotional needs as well as strategies implemented at home with their child.

**Sampling Strategy**

A purposive sampling method was employed to recruit needs assessment participants. All 7th grade students at De Marillac Academy were eligible and willing to participate in the focus groups. The purpose of the focus group was explained during the introduction of each group and verbal consent was collected. Five groups, consisting of four or five students each, resulted in a total sample size of 23 students. Participants in each group were selected based on assigned seating and availability for the class period. Only 7th grade students were selected for this sample because the pilot program will be tailored to and tested within this pre-identified population. Likewise, surveys were distributed only to parents and guardians of 7th grade students and staff and faculty who directly work with the 7th grade students.

**Data collection procedures**

Over the course of three weeks, 23 7th grade students participated in 5 focus groups. Each group consisted of four or five students and was conducted for 30 to 40 minutes. The goal of data collection among students was to learn more about students’ sources of stress, current stress management methods, and which strengths and areas for growth can be leveraged for resilience. At the start of each focus group, students were asked to complete a brief six-question survey. The group discussion consisted of open-ended questions, two card activities where students identified key areas of stress, and a “vote with your feet” activity where students rated
their own skills, strengths, and areas for growth. Responses were recorded by the facilitator on a laptop.

A 12-question anonymous online survey was distributed to the 7th grade team of teachers and staff members who have direct contact with 7th grade students. A similar anonymous 13-question survey was electronically distributed to 7th grade parents and guardians with an option to complete in either English or Spanish. Each group was given two weeks to complete the survey and a reminder was sent for each. Four faculty members and one staff member participated in the survey and 15 parents or guardians participated. Of the family surveys, seven were completed in English and eight were completed in Spanish. The goal of this data collection was to learn about sources of stress, coping skills, behavioral concerns, and areas for growth as perceived by adults who are closest to the students. Responses were collected and recorded using Qualtrics online software.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative Data Analysis was used to group similar observations, attitudes, and ideas in order to identify key themes. Findings were interpreted and summarized in an initial topline report. Findings will also inform key growth and skill areas for pilot activities to target.

**Needs Assessment Results**

**Participants**

**Students.** A total of 23 7th grade students participated in five focus groups. Each group consisted of four or five students. Of the student participants, 14 were female and nine were male.

**Parents / Families.** Of 23 parents or guardians of 7th graders asked to complete a survey, 15 responded. Of the family surveys, seven were completed in English and eight were completed
in Spanish. 12 female and three male parents or guardians participated, ranging in age from 26 to 55 years old. 13 participants identified themselves as Latino/a and two as Asian/Pacific Islander.

**Faculty / Staff.** Of nine total school officials asked, four faculty members and one staff member participated in the survey. Three participants identified as female and two as male. Three faculty and staff had been working at the agency for less than one year, one had been at the agency for six years, and one had been at the agency for more than ten years.

**Key Findings**

**In-school stressors.** According to the short written survey completed by all 7th grade students, almost all students (91%) felt stressed at school at least some days in the previous week. Notably, as illustrated in Figure 1, 39% felt stressed most or every day at school.

The primary source of stress at school was getting good grades, including completing assignments. One student expressed, “I feel pressured from everyone…to get good grades.” Students also cited teacher and parent expectations to earn straight A’s as a stressor. The second most commonly cited stressor was taking tests or quizzes, which included understanding the lesson. Students expressed that, although they took notes in class, they didn’t always comprehend the lesson which contributed to stress while taking tests and quizzes. Across faculty, staff, and parent participants, academic challenges were identified as the number one source of perceived stress in students, as seen in Figure 2.
Figure 2. Perceived sources of stress at school by parents, faculty, and staff. This graph illustrates how parents, faculty, and staff identified sources of students’ in-school stress in their responses.

Perhaps contributing to stress related to academic achievement, the third and fourth primary sources of stress in school were staying focused in class and noise in the classroom. Survey results revealed that 86% of the 7th grade class has a hard time focusing in class. Several students felt that their classmates created a distracting environment that made it difficult to concentrate on the lesson or get work done. One student also described, “Sometimes I’ll be thinking about stuff outside of school. I get lost and can’t do what I’m supposed to do because I wasn’t paying attention.” Aligned with these findings, faculty, staff, and parents perceived staying focused or attentive in class as a key source of stress in school for students. One parent noted, “I would love to help [my student] concentrate on class, [he] is easily distracted with anything.” Additionally, faculty and staff identified external noise and school discipline as a contributing sources of stress as well while parents did not identify these factors.

Finally, a theme around bullying and gossip emerged as a key in-school stressor, particularly among female students. Most students who identified this theme as stressful did not want to provide explicit detail about their own experiences, but described bullying and gossip as something their class is “known for” and that “everyone hates is when people talk about you behind your back.” Bullying, gossip, and peer pressure were identified as sources of in-school
stress by faculty, staff, and parents as frequently as challenges focusing in class. Notably, with
the exception of academic challenges, faculty and staff identified each category as a source of
stress more frequently than parent respondents did.

**Out-of-school stressors.** The student survey also revealed that most (78%) felt stressed outside of school at
least some days last week, illustrated by Figure 3.

The top external stressors identified by students were family problems. “I want to help my parents, but I
don’t know how. When my parents are stressed, I feel stressed too,” explained one student. Many students
also described feeling burdened by the responsibility to take care of younger siblings. “It’s a lot of responsibility taking care of [my siblings] and keeping them safe.” Family problems were only identified as key sources of stress among faculty
and staff; however, some parents identified housing instability and household income as perceived sources of external stress, shown in Figure 3.

Insufficient sleep, doing homework, and eating less were also common themes identified by students as out-of-school stressors. Doing homework and insufficient sleep appeared to be related stressors as one student described, “We stay up late, until 11 or 12, doing our homework
and don’t get enough sleep. Having enrichment and choir means we miss out on homework
support.” Another student described experiencing delayed sleep due to distractions and inability
to focus while doing homework. Other students attributed poor sleep to other environmental
disruptions. “My two older brothers are still doing homework at night and they keep the lights
on. I can’t sleep because we share a room and sometimes they get off-task and mess around…but
sometimes it’s not them and I don’t know why I can’t sleep.” Furthermore, several students agreed that feeling stressed contributed to increased hunger. Sufficient sleep and access to nutritious food were among the top three external stressors identified by faculty, staff, and parents.

The fifth most common theme that emerged around external stressors was “seeing things that make me uncomfortable” or “feeling unsafe” in the neighborhood. One student shared, “When my mom drives me to school sometimes I see drug dealers, people doing drugs…one time I saw someone get beat up in front of our school saying ‘call the police, they’re jumping me!’” Neighborhood safety was identified as the number one perceived source of external stress by faculty and staff as well as some parents.

**Figure 4.** Perceived sources of stress outside of school by parents, faculty, and staff. This graph illustrates how parents, faculty, and staff identified sources of students’ external stress in their responses.

**Stress management strategies and areas for growth.** Most students were able to identify signs of stress that included emotional (i.e. “Like I’m under a cloud in a storm” and feeling overwhelmed or unmotivated), physical (i.e. “I huff and puff,” get headaches and stomach aches, and can’t stop moving), and mental symptoms (i.e. scattered and “all over the place”). However, 30% of students responded that they find it difficult or very difficult to calm down in the moment.
Five themes emerged regarding stress management strategies used by students. Activities, such as drawing, physical activities or sport participation, napping, and eating were commonly mentioned. Media was also a common outlet identified for escaping stress such as listening to music, watching TV, playing video games, or surfing the internet on their cell phones. Although less common, some students sought out relational strategies, such as talking to a trusted friend or family member, and creating space, such as excusing oneself from class for a drink of water. Lastly, an avoidance theme also emerged, particularly among male students, which included shifting thoughts about the issue to something more positive, shutting down, or quitting.

When asked which skills or strengths would be most helpful to students’ academic and life success, most faculty, staff, and parents agreed that students could benefit from all items presented, observed in Figure 5. However, motivation, positive decision making, self-awareness, and stress management emerged as the most frequently identified areas for growth. One faculty or staff member added, “They need to learn how to be students that enable others to learn as well.”

![Picture of Desired Skills and Strengths](image)

**Figure 5. Desired skills and strengths for students identified by parent, faculty, and staff respondents.**

**Data Collection Summary**

All three sources of data indicated that stress plays a salient role in the lives of De Marillac’s 7th grade students. Several themes that students identified as primary stressors (such
as academic achievement, staying focused in class, and family problems) were also observed as areas of difficulty by parent, faculty, and staff participants. In their responses, students expressed a strong awareness of stress and its impacts on daily functioning as well as a desire to improve. These data helped inform the areas of self-management targeted by mindfulness pilot activities.

**Developing and Piloting Mindfulness Activities**

**Selected Themes and Activities**

Incorporating findings from the student focus groups and survey as well as parent, faculty, and staff electronic survey responses, a series of mindfulness activities were selected and adapted to pilot in the 7th grade classroom. Based on needs assessment findings, encouraging motivation, self-awareness, and positive decision making were priority themes for improving stress management and related challenges in the students. Activities were designed to support these identified needs and to build resilience and self-management among participants. Some activities, materials, and content were adapted from Scholastic’s The MindUP Curriculum: Grades 6-8, Mindful Schools, The Mind Body Awareness Project, MindfulTeachers.org, and Happify. Additionally, some activities, materials, and content were newly developed based on prior educational and professional training, tailored to meet student needs.

**Introduction to mindfulness.** The purpose of this theme was to introduce students to the concept of mindfulness. To distinguish the difference between mindful and mindless, groups of 5-6 students were given cards with different everyday scenarios and asked to sort them into a mindful pile and a mindless pile. Students were also asked to described their own examples of mindfulness and mindlessness.

**Mindful listening.** The purpose of this theme was to activate students’ sense of hearing, engage them in deep focus, and enable thoughtful response to auditory stimuli. The target skills
for mindful listening were increased focus, attentiveness, and self-awareness. The first activity was a breathing exercise where students were asked to be completely silent for one minute and focus on their breathing as well as any sounds they noticed inside or outside of the room. The second activity involved five pre-selected recordings (ocean sounds, a rainstorm, a campfire, sleigh bells, and an egg frying). Students listened carefully while completing individual worksheets that included space to note details about the sound, what the sound reminded them of or made them feel, and what they thought the sound was.

**Mindful choices.** The purpose of this theme was to distinguish mindfulness as a choice and an action rather than a feeling and to understand how mindful awareness of thoughts, feelings, and distractions can help us make positive decisions without letting them take control. The target skills for mindful choices included self-awareness, positive decision making, motivation, and personal empowerment. Students were first shown an animated video which illustrated two wolves as representing conflicting thoughts and feelings and explained how awareness of our thoughts and feelings allows us to act mindfully. Each student then received a card describing “The Lion Mind vs. The Dog Mind” and discussed the two mindsets in small groups using guided discussion questions.

**Mindful moving.** The purpose of this theme was to increase awareness of physical sensations and body signals, to practice intentional actions, and to empower students to identify their needs in the moment. The target skills for mindful moving included self-awareness, personal empowerment, stress management, and focus. The students first practiced a brief meditative exercise called “Yoga Nidra” (Tense and Let Go) which involves bringing awareness and relaxation slowly to various parts of the body. Then, students participated in a short balancing exercise: 30 seconds of unfocused balancing vs. 30 seconds of focused balancing. The
final activity was a “mindful relay race” where two groups of students lined up and carefully delivered a spoonful of water to their teammates until everyone had completed a turn. The goal of this relay race wasn’t to finish first, but to finish with water on the spoon.

**Mindful eating.** The purpose of this theme was to practice bringing attention and focus to the present moment while savoring it. The target skills of mindful eating were focus, attentiveness, and self-awareness. Students were each given a single piece of popcorn, then a single skittle and were guided in a class observation experience. Students observed what the snack looked like, felt like, smelled like, and what was happening in their mouths while looking at and smelling the food. Then, they slowly chewed the food and observed what it felt and tasted like before swallowing.

**Mindful seeing.** The purpose of this theme was to encourage slowing down, attention to detail, perspective, and observational skills. The target skills of mindful seeing were focus, attentiveness, and self-awareness. The activity opened with a reflection on the quote, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change," and images of famous landmarks taken from unusual perspectives. A student from each table then selected a wooden bead from a bowl. The beads were all similar in size, color, and shape, but had slight distinctions. Individually, students were given a few minutes to observe their object and write down as many descriptors as possible. Then they compared notes with their teammates. Finally, all the beads were collected and mixed into the bowl again for students to identify their original bead from.

**Acting with empathy and compassion.** The purpose of this theme was to enable students to show empathy and compassion to others while empowering them to recognize when they need to be shown empathy and compassion. The target skills of acting with empathy and compassion were self-awareness, personal empowerment, and relational skills. Students first
viewed a short video that featured youth describing empathy and examples of showing it to classmates. Students then participated in a class “step into the circle” activity which involved students forming a circle and stepping into the center when they identified with the statement read aloud. Some statements included “You are excited for summer,” “You are having a hard time with something in your life today,” and “Someone has done or said something to you this week that really made your day.” For the last activity, each student was given a piece of paper with a random classmate’s name. They were asked to think about this student, put themselves in their shoes (especially if it was someone they might not get along with well), and write an affirmation, thank you, or encouraging note to this person. These were then collected and distributed later in the day.

**Gratitude.** The purpose of this theme was to encourage students to foster an “attitude of gratitude” by noticing small reasons to be grateful, to educate students about the benefits of gratitude, and to bring closure to the group while providing a simple tool for continuing to practice mindfulness. The target skills of gratitude were self-awareness, personal empowerment, and optimism. Students first viewed a short video clip which explained how showing appreciation and expressing gratitude positively impacts overall well-being. Students then took one minute to write down as many things they were grateful for that they could think of. Students were then asked to sit in a circle and select a smooth stone from a bag. As they held their own unique stone, students each reflected on a word that is meaningful or comforting to them or something they felt they needed (some examples listed on the board included peace, courage, patience, strength, and joy). They then wrote their word on their stone and shared aloud. Students kept their stones as a reminder or keepsake to hold while breathing, meditating, praying, and so on.
Testing Methods

Data collection tools. A weekly facilitator outline (Appendix F) was developed to guide each mindfulness session. The outline included activity instructions, notes describing the purpose and target outcomes of session content, discussion questions and talking points, materials needed to facilitate activities, and estimated time allotted for each part. The outline was designed as a simple sheet to reference throughout the session and ensure consistency, organization, and structure.

A midpoint student evaluation (Appendix G) was designed to capture student feedback on materials and activities to date as well as assess learning and application of concepts. The feedback was incorporated to improve the second half of mindfulness sessions. The one-page, double-sided form was designed to be completed individually, anonymously, and in the classroom setting. Within this form, students were provided the opportunity to identify activities they found most and least helpful as well as space to provide additional, open-ended comments.

A final student evaluation was designed to capture student feedback on materials and activities in the second portion of mindfulness sessions and to assess overall learning and application of concepts. The form closely resembled the midpoint evaluation to gain feedback on individual activities and open-ended reflections.

Data collection and testing procedures. Mindfulness sessions were facilitated once a week over the course of the last nine weeks of the academic school year. Each session, conducted directly after students’ morning break, lasted 30 minutes, opening and closing with meditative silence facilitated by a singing bowl ring. Prior to activities, students participated in a short breathing exercise or yoga stretch. A personal mindfulness journal was distributed to each student and used periodically to allow students to reflect on activities and exercises. Journals
were collected and reviewed for safety purposes. Additionally, “mindful minute” cards (Appendix H) were distributed in students’ weekly take-home folders. Each card outlined a three-step mindful exercise to practice outside of school. The first student feedback survey was distributed at the end of the fifth mindfulness session and the second student feedback survey was distributed at the end of the final mindfulness session.

**Results**

**Creating a space for calm and quiet.** Of the ongoing weekly exercises, students found the singing bowl and mindful journals most helpful. They expressed that the bell was calming and felt that it symbolized a fresh start. Most students also enjoyed having the space to express themselves and reflect privately in their journals. Conversely, many students noted that mindfulness time would be more enjoyable if there was less noise in the classroom. Among activities most frequently identified as least helpful were the balancing exercise and student-led meditation, for similar reasons. Some students described the balancing exercise as too energized, loud, and unfocused. The student-led meditation was also described as difficult to hear and difficult to concentrate when others were joking around.

**Engaged, interactive learning.** Overall, students predominantly enjoyed activities that were interactive and engaging. When asked what would help them enjoy mindfulness sessions more in the midpoint survey, many noted that they would enjoy more inclusion of music, videos, competitions, and food. The finding was aligned with the most and least helpful activities and lessons identified in the survey. Among activities and lessons most frequently identified as helpful were the guessing sounds, mindful relay race, mindful eating, and mindful stone activities. Students found these activities most helpful because they were fun ways to learn mindfulness concepts. For example, some students described that the mindful relay race allowed
them to be interactive, competitive, and collaborative. In addition to enjoying the snacks, mindful eating was described as “it helped me see what we eat in a different way” and “helped me realize we have to take out time.” Furthermore, while most students enjoyed time to journal, others expressed they found this exercise boring and tended to prefer more interactive activities.

Need for clarity. Overwhelmingly, the least helpful ongoing exercises was identified as the Thursday take-home folder cards. Students cited a number of issues with this exercise including the cards getting lost, not checking their folders, not knowing how to use the cards, not having time, or not finding them useful. Additionally, many students found the empathy video unhelpful because they didn’t understand the purpose.

Lessons learned and continued areas for growth. After the first 5 sessions, students demonstrated a strong grasp of mindfulness concepts. The main themes that emerged from students learning at this point included how to calm down, relax the body, and focus; to be aware of surroundings and practice safety; and to be more aware of thoughts, words, and actions as well as their impact on others. After the final mindfulness session, these descriptors expanded to include phrases such as “a clear happy mind,” “having an open heart,” and “being in the [present].” One student described mindfulness as “helpful and helps people persevere.” Most students included words such as calm, relaxed, and aware to described what mindfulness is to them. In practice, many students described deep breathing to calm down, being in a quiet space, and taking breaks as strategies to reduce stress going forward.

At the end of the session, students identified some ongoing areas of difficulty or confusion in learning mindfulness. Aligned with the need to create space for calm and quiet, students found it difficult to stay focused, quiet, and still. Additionally, some students expressed challenges with calming down in the moment or practicing mindfulness “all the time.”
Discussion

Research shows that prolonged exposure to environmental stressors are linked to poor long-term health outcomes and success in life. These risks are particularly high for urban, low-income adolescents. By conducting a needs assessment with De Marillac Academy’s 7th grade students, parents, and the faculty and staff who directly work with them, the most prevalent sources of stress were identified as academic achievement, focusing in class, and family problems. Students commonly described links between these stressors, including inability to focus in class due to preoccupation with a family issue or inability to complete homework due to distractions at home, resulting in poor grades. These findings support previous studies which suggest a link between family- and neighborhood-related stressors and behavioral and academic outcomes (Wade et al., 2014). Additionally, four themes including motivation, self-awareness, positive decision making, and stress management emerged as key target areas to decrease challenging behaviors and improve resilience. These themes align with existing literature that has identified similar social and emotional skills as conducive to positive youth development and resilience (Kendziora & Osher, 2016), and informed a pilot series of mindfulness-based activities.

An emerging body of literature points to mindfulness-based classroom interventions as an effective, low cost approach to reducing the effects of toxic stress among youth. However, there is a gap in research determining which instructional methods for teaching mindfulness are most effective (Sibinga et al., 2015). The nine-week pilot series of 30-minute mindfulness lessons developed for this project suggests promising strategies for effectively teaching and engaging urban, low-income students in mindfulness. Because many students identified noise in the classroom as a source of stress and contributing factor to difficulty focusing in class, it was
unsurprising that a majority of the class embraced opportunities for quiet meditation and reflection and rejected activities that were loud or chaotic. Several weeks into piloting, one 7th grade teacher expressed that she had adopted the use of a singing bowl for daily quiet breaks and found this to be an effective classroom management approach. Consistent with needs assessment findings that suggested difficulty concentrating on or understanding the lesson while taking notes, students appeared most focused when actively participating in an activity and discussing with their peers. Although some students still struggled with focus and stillness, at the end of nine weeks almost every student was able to define mindfulness and identify a strategy for mindful practice in a stressful situation.

Several facilitators to success emerged from this project. The most important factor was faculty and staff support in conducting the needs assessment and pilot activities. Support involved openness to piloting mindfulness activities with students, support in outreach to parents, faculty, and staff for survey distribution, providing office and classroom space for focus groups and mindfulness sessions, collaboration on content, and creating time in students’ schedules for mindfulness sessions to occur.

Additionally, flexibility and modifications to content based on observations rather than strictly following a script allowed space to ensure students understood concepts. For example, there was initial confusion around mindfulness as a positive mood rather than a sense of awareness, action, or choice. Pausing to distinguish this difference was valuable in creating clarity as sessions progressed. Furthermore, incorporating real life examples and applications of abstract mindfulness concepts as often as possible was perceived to be helpful in encouraging understanding. For example, topics of empathy and compassion were applied to familiar
experiences such as bullying in school. Lastly, sticker incentives were used to reward and encourage participation.

**Limitations**

Although there were several strengths to this project, some limitations must be considered. The first is that limited research and evidence exists in the field of school-based mindfulness interventions. This challenge presents several questions for effective facilitation such as what frequency and dosage of mindfulness is encouraged to facilitate long-term behavioral impacts and health outcomes. Despite this limitation, practices used in each mindfulness session were adapted from various age-appropriate resources to best address the identified areas of need suggested in the needs assessment. Future longitudinal studies should examine the long-term impacts of school-based mindfulness, and using various doses of practice.

Second, mindfulness sessions were limited to 30 minutes per week and nine weeks total. Although the ideal length of time dedicated to mindfulness teaching and practice is uncertain, it is possible that increased exposure to mindfulness practice could increase likelihood of understanding and adoption of these skills outside of class. In some weeks, there was not enough time to complete all activities or debrief questions. More time to debrief activities and assess what students learned could have fostered better comprehension. Furthermore, because mindfulness activities were facilitated during the last nine weeks of the school year, students may have been less engaged due to the approaching summer break. Although timing was limited, students received mindfulness lessons every week and every effort was made to ensure time was maximized for priority activities.

Although needs assessment surveys were distributed electronically to parents, faculty, and staff to increase convenience and accessibility (including the option to complete in English
or Spanish for parents), an important limitation of this method is that the Likert-scale responses to a majority of questions do not offer an opportunity to probe or determine reasons why certain responses were selected. It’s possible, for example, that identifying “positive decision making” as an area for growth in students may have been selected based on different meanings and motivations of the concept. An opportunity for follow-up interviews, either in-person or via phone, with willing participants of each group may be helpful in future assessments for capturing richer qualitative data.

Finally, the needs assessment and pilot activities were conducted with a single class of 7th graders at De Marillac Academy and it is possible that this class’ characteristics differ from previous and future 7th grade classes. This variance may result in different outcomes when facilitating mindfulness activities with future 7th grade classes at De Marillac Academy.

**Implications for practice**

De Marillac Academy’s vision statement describes a “holistic program [that] liberates students and graduates to lead lives of choice, meaning and purpose.” Adopting mindfulness-based practices aimed at building resilience and reducing the impact of toxic stress in students supports De Marillac’s vision by increasing social and emotional skill development that benefit holistic health and quality of life. Embedding mindfulness into De Marillac’s school culture, including staff development days, is recommended to achieve optimal results.

According to research, over 40% of adolescents experience a behavioral health problem by 7th grade (SAMHSA, 2016). Although the current pilot program addresses these needs at this critical point for De Marillac’s most at-risk students, future research should consider the best methods for expanding this program by implementing preventative mindfulness-based practices in lower grade levels. One recommendation is to educate and train 7th and 8th grade students in
mindfulness to then serve as peer educators for lower grade levels. This method presents a low-cost approach to expand reach and promote a school-wide culture of mindfulness with minimal impact on teachers’ workload.

An additional area of future research is an evaluation of the mindfulness program’s success at De Marillac Academy. A longitudinal study design is recommended to assess student behavioral outcomes over time. This recommended outcome evaluation should measure whether students’ understanding and practice of mindfulness increases and whether long-term stress-management improves, controlling for confounding factors that may impact stress-management skills. Based on this pilot project and general trends in school-based mindfulness interventions, it is recommended that mindfulness activities and a 1-3 minute breathing meditation are administered once a week for nine weeks in the fall, supplemented by ongoing mindful practices throughout the year, such as daily breathing exercises (MindUP Curriculum, 2011). De Marillac’s Graduate Support program should be engaged to reach the study cohort over time as this resource provides key access to De Marillac’s graduate students throughout high school and college. Results from this study could contribute valuable data to growing literature on the effectiveness of school-based mindfulness on behavioral health outcomes.
References


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https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk


Appendices

Appendix A.

*Student Focus Group Guide (sample questions)*

**Open Questions**
1. What is the best thing about being a 7th grader?
2. What is the most difficult thing about being a 7th grader?
3. How can you tell when you feel stressed? How does your body feel?

**Card Activity:** From these cards, work as a team to choose the top 3 things that make you feel stressed at school.

- Understanding the lesson
- Bullying or gossip
- Noise in the classroom
- Noise outside of the building
- Taking tests or quizzes
- Giving presentations
- Getting in trouble
- Staying focused in class
- Staying focused during mass
- Learning new things
- Completing assignments
- Getting good grades
- Turning in work you are proud of
- Having enough space

**Follow up Questions:**
- Why did you choose these cards?
- What do you typically do to handle each of these stressful things?
- Was there anything missing that causes you stress?
Appendix B.

*Student Survey (sample questions)*

1. How many days last week did you feel stressed *at* school?
   - Everyday
   - Most days
   - Some days
   - None
2. How many days last week did you feel stressed *outside* of school?
   - Everyday
   - Most days
   - Some days
   - None
3. When your body feels tense from stress, how easy is it to calm down in the moment?
   - Very easy
   - Easy
   - Difficult
   - Very difficult

Appendix C.

*Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BRS 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRS 2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRS 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRS 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRS 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRS 6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAASC) modified for children:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I could be feeling a certain way and not realize it until later.</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I find it hard to stay focused on what’s happening in the present moment.</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Usually, I walk quickly to get where I’m going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Usually, I do not notice if my body feels tense or uncomfortable until it gets really bad.</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I forget a person’s name almost as soon as I’ve been told it for the first time.</td>
<td>.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. It seems that I am doing things automatically without really being aware of what I am doing.</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I focus so much on a future goal I want to achieve that I don’t pay attention to what I am doing right now to reach it.</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I do jobs, chores, or schoolwork automatically without being aware of what I’m doing.</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I walk into a room, and then wonder why I went there.</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I can’t stop thinking about the past or the future.</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I find myself doing things without paying attention.</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I snack without being aware that I’m eating.</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D.
Faculty / Staff Survey (sample questions)

5. Which area(s), if any, do your students struggle with most in the classroom? (Select all that apply)
   a. Academic achievement
   b. Peer relations
   c. Staying focused or attentive
   d. Disruptive outbursts
   e. Aggressive behavior
   f. None of the above
   g. Other: _________

6. How many of your students have trouble focusing on what is happening in the present moment?
   a. Most of my students
   b. Many of my students
   c. Some of my students
   d. None of my students

8. What do you perceive as sources of stress for your students outside of school? (Select all that apply)
   a. Neighborhood safety
   b. Household income
   c. Family instability
   d. Housing stability
   e. Access to nutritious food
   f. Sufficient sleep
   g. Responsibilities at home (such as caring for siblings)
   h. Physical or mental health support
   i. Law enforcement
   j. None of the above
   k. Other: _________

10. Which of the following skills or strengths would be most helpful to your students’ academic and life success? (Select all that apply)
    a. Stress management
    b. Emotional management
    c. Relational skill development
    d. Empathy
    e. Optimism
    f. Self-awareness
    g. Motivation
h. Positive decision making
i. Peaceful conflict resolution
j. Self-esteem
k. Personal empowerment
l. None of the above
m. Other: ________

Appendix E.

Parent Survey (English sample)

6. Which area(s), if any, does your child struggle with most at school? (Select all that apply)
   a. Academic achievement
   b. Peer relations
   c. Staying focused or attentive
   d. Disruptive outbursts
   e. Aggressive behavior
   f. None of the above
   g. Other: ________

7. How often does your child have trouble focusing on what is happening in the present moment?
   a. All the time
   b. Most of the time
   c. Sometimes
   d. Never

9. What sources of stress does your child experience at school? (Select all that apply)
   a. Academic challenges (includes completing assignments, grades, understanding concepts)
   b. Focusing in class
   c. Bullying, gossip, or peer pressure
   d. School discipline
   e. Physical or mental health needs
   f. Safety
   g. External noise
   h. None of the above
   i. Other: ________

11. Which of the following skills or strengths do you think would be most helpful to your child’s academic and life success? (Select all that apply)
    a. Stress management
    b. Emotional management
    c. Relational skill development
d. Empathy
e. Optimism
f. Self-awareness
g. Motivation
h. Positive decision making
i. Peaceful conflict resolution
j. Self-esteem
k. Personal empowerment
l. None of the above
m. Other: _________

Appendix F.

Sample Facilitator Outline

Week 6: Mindful eating

Target skills: self-awareness, focus / attentiveness
Purpose: To practice bringing attention and focus to the present moment while savoring it

- Opening: Bell + breathing exercise (5 minutes):
  o Invite a student volunteer to select a mindfulness card and lead the class in the selected exercise
- Possible activities (10 minutes):
  o Students are given a small snack (i.e. a raisin, a piece of a tangerine, etc.) and instructor guides students through sensations of eating asking students to describe what the food looks like, smells like, feels like in their hands, what is happening in their mouths as they look and smell it, how it feels in the mouth, what it tastes like with each bite, what it feels like when swallowing the piece of food
  ▪ Extra materials: Small snack (23)
- Debrief (5 minutes)
  o What did you think about the activity?
    ▪ Was it fun, boring, engaging, challenging?
    ▪ What did you like best?
    ▪ What did you like least?
  o Would you use this exercise on your own?
    ▪ Where? How? With who?
    ▪ What would help you do this exercise on your own? Cue cards?
  o How was the length of this activity?
    ▪ Too long? Too Short? Just right?
- Optional: Journaling (3 minutes)
  o What did you notice about yourself during the mindful eating activity?
  o What other situations can being present or mindful help you enjoy or appreciate the moment more?
- Closing (1 minute)
  o Mindful bodies
Appendix G.

Midpoint Student Evaluation Survey

7th Grade Mindfulness Reflection Sheet

Over the past few weeks we’ve learned about and practiced different types of mindfulness such as mindful breathing, mindful listening, mindful choices, and mindful moving. Please take some time to reflect on the activities we’ve done and what you’ve learned so far.

Instructions: In the boxes below, circle the activities you enjoyed or found helpful and cross out the activities that you did not enjoy or found unhelpful. Then, answer the two questions below the box. “Helpful” means you learned how to use mindfulness to de-stress or focus better and want to use it again. “Unhelpful” means the activity was confusing or not interesting and you wouldn’t use it again.

Ongoing Exercises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singing Bowl</th>
<th>Mindful Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting each session by ringing the bell</td>
<td>Writing about your thoughts and feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing Meditations</td>
<td>Thursday Folder Cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing mindful breathing and relaxation meditations after the bell</td>
<td>3-step mindfulness activities to practice at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The most helpful of the above was ______________ because ________________________________.
2. The least helpful of the above was ______________ because ________________________________.

Weekly Activities & Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Mindful or Mindless” class activity</th>
<th>Silent listening and journaling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listing the differences on the board</td>
<td>Listening silently to different sounds inside and outside of the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mindful or Mindless” small group activity</td>
<td>Guessing sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting mindful &amp; mindless cards in small groups</td>
<td>Listening to different recorded sounds and recording observations on a worksheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent listening and journaling</td>
<td>Balancing Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening silently to different sounds inside and outside of the classroom</td>
<td>Focused and unfocused balancing on one leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing sounds</td>
<td>Mindful Relay Race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to different recorded sounds and recording observations on a worksheet</td>
<td>Mindful walking with a spoon full of water</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The most helpful of the above was ______________ because ________________________________.
2. The least helpful of the above was ______________ because ________________________________.
Instructions: Please complete the sentences below thoughtfully and honestly. Raise your hand if you have any questions or need help.

1. One thing I’ve learned from mindfulness is ________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

2. One thing I want to learn more about mindfulness is ______________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

3. One way I can use mindfulness at home is ______________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

4. Mindfulness time would be better if ___________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments about mindfulness you want Ms. Santos to know:

___________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________
Appendix H.

Mindful Minute Cards (Sample Selection)

**Mindful Minute**

*as easy as 1, 2, 3*

1. **Pay attention to the present**
   - Notice and relax your body.
   - Relax areas of tightness or tension.
   - Just breathe.

2. **Focus on your breath**
   - Feel the natural flow of breath—in, out.

3. **Notice your body**
   - Bring attention to the whole body and notice any sensations that are present.

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**Being Aware**

*“With mindfulness, we can choose what we’ll strengthen and bring into action, and we can choose what we’ll gently let go of.”*

1. **Be still**
   - Take a few moments to quietly pay attention to how you are feeling.

2. **Notice what is on your mind and heart**
   - What thoughts and feelings come up?
   - Which ones are helpful and unhelpful?
   - Do any of them surprise you?

3. **Feed your thoughts**
   - What can you focus on to be more at peace?
   - What can you let go of?
   - Who can you ask to help you?

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**Tense & Let Go**

*“Relaxation is the art of letting go.”*

1. **Lay down**
   - Get into a comfortable position and focus on your breath for a few moments.

2. **Slowly tense different parts of your body**
   - Scrunch your toes, squeeze your leg muscles, pull your belly button in, scrunch your shoulders, make fists, close your eyes tightly.

3. **Let go**
   - One by one, relax each body part.
   - Does your body feel at peace?
   - What about your mind?