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# ON-THE-SPOT MINDFULNESS BASED PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING BEHAVIOR CHALLENGES AMONG 3rd GRADERS

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ON-THE-SPOT MINDFULNESS BASED PRACTICES FOR ADDRESSING BEHAVIOR  
CHALLENGES AMONG 3<sup>rd</sup> GRADERS

By

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project was to introduce and implement a mindfulness based tool that will empower students to manage their stress which contributes to their classroom behavior and allow teachers to minimize the amount of classroom time spent addressing behavior challenges.

**Methods:** Observations of third grade classrooms, key informant interviews with third grade teachers and community observations were conducted at the Achieve Academy School while throughout the school day.

**Results:** Findings showed that students would benefit from the implementation of On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Techniques and Practices by minimizing stress, increasing academic success and improving the overall behavior, social, emotion and attention regulation skills of each student.

**Recommendations:** Implementing mindfulness practices that are immediate and brief, taking anywhere from 3-5 minutes, would be most beneficial to the students as well as increase the likelihood of implementation by the teachers and Seneca staff. There are 5 activities that teachers will be able to choose from that consist of breathing exercises, mindful emotion, mindful role play, mindfulness yoga, and meditation. When implemented correctly, each activity will allow for the students to enhance their behavior, social, emotion and attention skills.

**Conclusions:** The future implementation of On-The-Spot Mindfulness Techniques would allow for teachers to maximize their time teaching their students and for students to manage their behavior when in a crisis situation using a proactive approach instead of a reactive approach.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine a classroom filled with thirty-two third grade students, eager to learn about each subject on the classroom schedule. One student starts to throw a tantrum because they believe another student has their book. This student begins to disrupt the learning of each student in the classroom which forces the teacher to stop teaching to address that student's needs. Due to the behavior challenges of this one student, the teacher must take away from the classroom learning to spend time with addressing the situation. What would be the best solution? Is it reasonable for the teacher to take classroom learning time to address one's students challenging behaviors while the other students spend their valuable classroom time waiting? How should the other students deal with their stress they encounter from their peer's tantrum? Is there a tool that could be implemented to address the behavior challenges and stress levels of each student in the classroom?

This paper focuses on why implementing On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practices would be beneficial for third grade students at Achieve Academy by addressing the behavior challenges and increasing overall success of each student. Through the partnership established between the teachers at Achieve Academy and the staff members of Seneca Family of Agencies, a non-profit organization that provides behavior and mental health services to the students at Achieve Academy, the primary goal that would be obtained by adding a mindfulness tool consisting of five mindfulness based practices that target the psychological health and well-being of the individual student. Students would feel empowered to manage their behavior and teachers would be able to maximize their time committed to student learning and achieving student outcomes instead of spending unnecessary time managing classroom behaviors.

Based on community and classroom based observations, key informant interviews and evidence based interventions, recommendations for implementing the mindfulness based practices were made. In addition to the recommendations, a mindfulness tool with various activities will give teachers as well as Seneca staff guidance in implementing. Future research on this population will allow for greater implementation of mindfulness based practices among elementary students.

## INTRODUCTION

Mindfulness is centered on the psychological health and well-being of an individual. The practices associated with mindfulness techniques can be applied to all individuals in essentially every setting whether it be in a school setting, workplace setting, community event setting or when an individual is completing a daily task where mindfulness techniques may be necessary. Mindfulness can help children and youth manage their behavior, social, emotion and attention skills while in a classroom setting. It is also important to focus on mindfulness because it allows students to minimize stress, enhance academic performance and manage behavior, allowing for the student to engage in healthy learning while in a stress-free environment. The implementation of mindfulness practices is a relatively recent concept. Burke (2014) did research on the development of mindfulness techniques and practices and the early stages of practice. He found that although the very first research studies were published in 2005, by 2014, there were less than fifty published studies of Mindfulness-Based interventions with youth. This compares to over a thousand adult studies. Burke and colleagues also addressed the significant gap in research. Children and adolescents have been overlooked in this area because researchers believed that younger children did not have the cognitive ability to understand the meaning of mindfulness practices and that these practices were originally put in place to change physiological and psychological behaviors in adults. Findings from Burke's research proved that mindfulness may offer beneficial effects for children and adolescents' psychological health and well-being if taught effectively and practiced regularly.

There are many forms of mindfulness based practices that can be implemented in several ways, whether it be through meditation, healthy physical activity or by directly enhancing the psychological and cognitive capacity of an individual. The role of the implementer or teacher

also makes a difference in how beneficial and effective the mindfulness based practices are with the elementary school students. “Qualitative studies focusing on outcomes of school-based mindfulness and yoga programs have described youth reported program benefits with respect to school-level factors (e.g., school climate; classroom engagement) and individual level behavioral (e.g., breathing; constructive self-distraction; improved sleep); cognitive (e.g., awareness, attentiveness, forward thinking); emotional (e.g., calm, relaxation); and social outcomes (e.g., self-assertion, improved peer relationships)” (Dariotis et al., 2016). By looking at the many mindfulness based interventions that have been implemented and the assessments that have been made among children and youth, researchers have presented valuable arguments for explaining the health benefits and academic success associated with mindfulness based practices and why they are necessary among elementary school students. To maximize effectiveness of the practices, researchers have highlighted the successes, the limitations and what is needed for future practice of mindfulness techniques and practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Mindfulness Based Practices through Meditation**

One of the most common practices of mindfulness based practices is in the form of meditation exercises. Crescentini et al., (2016) looked at how mindfulness based practices can be implemented in the psychological form of meditation by examining problems centered around attention deficit disorder and other disorders by assessing the health effects of a Mindfulness-Oriented Meditation (MOM) program compared with an active control condition focused on emotion awareness but not involving meditation exercises among Italian children (7-8 years of age) in primary school. They conducted a longitudinal study that was conducted with 16 children in the MOM group and 15 children in the control group. Researchers used a scale to assess eight

different behavioral and mental health problems among the population being observed, including anxiety/depression, withdrawal/depression, somatic complaints, social problems, thought problems, attention problems, rule-breaking behavior, and aggressive behavior. To address these problems, an eight-week intervention was led by two mindfulness meditation instructors implementing mindfulness meditation programs. The teachers completed comprehensive pre-training and post training evaluations of their students while the children's self-reported measure of mood and depressive symptoms taken were used in the data collection. Based on the evaluations completed by the teachers and data collected from the study, the findings were interpreted that there was a positive effect of the mindfulness-meditation training and that it was beneficial in reducing children's training in reducing children's internalizing problems. Crescentini and colleagues (2016) believe that future research could be focused on the positive effects of MOM on attention and ADHD symptoms, as well as on other behavior problems (e.g., internalizing problems) to encourage future applications of mindfulness-based therapies in ADHD, and possibly other disorders, in developmental age due to limitations in this area.

### **Mindfulness Based Practices Through Healthy Physical Activity**

To identify the association between mindfulness based practices and physical health activity, Dariotis et al., (2016) focused on assessing the implementation of an intervention that focuses on the use of mindfulness through a physical health activity. The target population consisted of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in a 16-week mindfulness and yoga intervention that was implemented by an outside non-profit organization. Similar to Crescentini and his fellow researchers, Dariotis and his colleagues recruited students for their study but also allowed for teacher informants to participate as well. The students and teacher informants answered open-

ended questions to provide a standard understanding of the mindfulness skills students had access to and could apply to their decision making.

The researchers conducted four focus groups during the intervention, with two focus groups being conducted after the intervention during the follow-up process. Findings showed that three themes emerged: 1. Youth conflated stress with negative emotions, 2. Peer and family conflicts were common stressors and 3. Youth reported improved impulse control and emotional regulation following the intervention. Findings also implicated that modifications should be made to the intervention content and how quantitative measurements should be taken during future implementation. This intervention proved to be a success according to the data collected, but researchers believed that to improve this intervention, other approaches to skills integration would include promotion of pro-social behavior and focus more attention to the classroom. A limitation of the intervention was the follow through of the implementation by the teachers. Researchers agreed that it would have been best if teachers, familiar with intervention techniques, encourage students' use of skills, such as deep breathing. Teachers could also prompt skills use to encourage students to manage difficult emotions, such as anxiety prior to a test or anger during a difficult interaction with a teacher or peer.

In addition, we can analyze how Lam et al., (2016) implemented a pilot study on school based mindfulness techniques with Hong Kong elementary students. The focus of the study was to show that implementing mindfulness techniques decrease internalizing behaviors of students facing behavior challenges by testing the impact of mindfulness techniques. The researchers conducted a randomized controlled trial and split the children into two groups to analyze how the students would respond to their daily classroom schedules with or without the use of mindfulness

techniques being implemented. Lam et al., (2016) presented findings that the use of mindfulness reduced internalizing behaviors such as worry and anxiety in children.

### **How Mindfulness Based Practices Affect Emotions And Behavior**

In contrast to Crecentini et al., (2016) and Dariotis et al., (2016) who focused on how mindfulness based practices affect behavior, Jayawardene and colleagues (2017) focused on how treatment and counseling services and mind-body techniques affect the emotional beliefs and behavioral actions of school-aged students that are already faced with behavior and emotional difficulties and challenges. Treatment and counseling services consisted of any services received from school social workers, school psychologist, school nurse, school counselor, special-education teacher or speech, occupational or physical therapist. Mind-body techniques consisted of yoga, tai chi, qi-gong, meditation, guided imagery and progressive relaxation. This study was based on secondary data analysis of data from 2007 and 2012. The study population consisted of school age children with DCEBG between 5-17 years of age. Data was collected from child respondent and an adult residing in the household with knowledge of the child's health, using computer-assisted personal interviewing which guided the interviewer through a questionnaire. *“Overall, do you think that the child has difficulties in any of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behavior, or being able to get along with other people?”*, *“During the past 6 months, did the child receive any treatment or counseling from a school social worker, school psychologist, school nurse, school counselor, special-ed teacher, or school speech, occupational or physical therapist?”* and use of mind-body techniques including, yoga, tai-chi, qi gong, meditation, guided imagery and progressive relaxation in the past 12 months were instruments used to conduct research. Demographic socioeconomic variables such as age, sex, and race/ethnicity of the child, level of education, the ratio of family income to poverty threshold,

family size, activity limitations among family members, persons whom child gets along with better, health insurance coverage, health care delays and utilization of health care services during the past 12 months were self-reported. Only the participants that answered all survey questions were included in the analysis. Researchers found that results showed that in 2007 and 2012, mind body technique use was significantly greater for DCEBG children, compared with healthy students not dealing with the same challenges. However, mind body technique uses among children with DCEBG decreased significantly over time. Researchers believed that this was due to reporting bias, a major limitation in the study. All children who reportedly had minor, definite, or severe DCEBG were included in the analysis, disregarding level of severity since severity of difficulty was based on the subjective assessment of the adult respondent. This limitation caused variance in accuracy of data reported on the abilities of the students with the disabilities.

### **The Role Of The Teachers In Mindfulness And Their Benefits**

In addition to the behavior and emotional benefits of implementing mindfulness based practices among students, similar to the study conducted by Crescentini et al., (2016), it is essential to look at who is in charge or the overseer of directly implementing the mindfulness techniques and how it affects their well-being. Hinds and colleagues (2015) focused on how teachers exhibit the role of experiential avoidance when experiencing distress. Experiential avoidance is an action taken by most teachers to avoid thoughts feelings, memories, physical sensations or other internal experiences even if it causes health issues in the long run. The study focused on several measures including demographics, teacher psychological well-being, teacher stress, staff social support, and experiential avoidance. When focused on these factors, findings suggested that these factors were most important in determining the level of experiential avoidance among teachers because they weighed heavily on how the individual responded to

situations. Thirty-three schools were recruited over the course of three years and baseline data was collected from teachers. Schools were paired for assessments and attendance-based workshops were offered to the teachers to gather data. Researchers found that Experiential Avoidance (EA) plays a role in teachers' psychological well-being and is associated with depression, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization, and significantly negatively associated with personal accomplishment. With these findings, they found a positive correlation between how teachers respond to students based off their personal psychological well-being. The main limitations of the study consisted of the following: 1. Longitudinal studies show that EA predicts varied measures of psychological functioning, 2. Some longitudinal studies show that EA mediates relationships between exposure to stress and psychological distress. Evidence indicated that interventions focused on reducing EA work and that reductions in EA allows for mediation of the effects present in the intervention and the diversity in outcomes associated with implementation.

In addition, there are many interventions in which both the students as well as the teachers benefit from the intervention. Gouda et al., (2016) and Meiklejohn et al., (2012) conducted interventions that focused on implementing mindfulness based practices aimed to eliminate the stress experienced by both the students and the teachers to increase resilience to managing their daily stress, self-efficacy, self-regulation, interpersonal competences, creativity anxiety and depression levels. Gouda et al., (2016) looked at research gaps in studies that evaluated student and teacher participation in a *Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MSBR)* course, an eight-week program targeting an individual's mental health. Empirical findings showed biological and psychological benefits. Following the eight-week mindfulness intervention, the experimental group showed higher brain activity associated with positive affect

and reported higher immune functioning. Findings also suggested that this is among the first to analyze the similarities and differences of MSBR on students and teachers and that there should be distinction in the development of mindfulness tools for children, adolescents and adults.

In comparison, Meiklejohn et al., (2012) focused on the integration of mindfulness training into K-12 education, both indirectly by training teachers and through direct teaching of students. By introducing a mindfulness curricula, teachers and students would be able to better manage stress by practicing mind-body practices that aim to increase focused attention, social competencies, and emotional self-regulation. The curricula lessons would also target inner/outer experiences such as focused attention on breath and sensory experiences, awareness of thoughts and emotions, movement practices, and caring or kindness practices. Meiklejohn and colleagues (2012) analyzed a number of mindfulness programs currently being implemented in order to rational reasoning for the need of mindfulness curricula. Findings showed that more research must be conducted so that there is empirical evidence suggesting a clear need for implementation. Both interventions focused on a number of trainings that consisted of classes, workshops and self-managing practices that would allow students and teachers to be receptive to addressing the stress. Limitations associated with both studies were that there may have been reporting bias associated with the study during pre- and post- surveys offered to teachers and students. All in all, like Crescentini et al., (2016), researchers felt that it would be best if teachers are comfortable and familiar with mindfulness practices that encourage students' use of skills to reduce stress and teachers could also prompt skills use to encourage students to manage difficult emotions, such as stress related to a test or frustration during a difficult interaction with a teacher or peer.

## **Mindfulness Schools and Programs**

Mindful Schools is a not-for-profit training organization that was founded in 2007 as a program of a single school in Oakland, CA. The program offers courses and curriculum taught by educators that are centered around practical skills for self-care, facilitation, and by connecting with youth in offering simple, yet effective mindfulness practices that can be implemented in the school day and adapted for essentially any environment. The six-week curriculum specifically focuses on mindfulness fundamentals: 1. Mindfulness of Breath, 2. Mindfulness of Body, 3. Mindfulness of Emotions, 4. Development of the Heart, 5. Interpersonal Mindfulness, and Everyday Mindfulness. Each area highlights different components of mindfulness that are geared towards improvements in overall physiological and psychological health. Similar to the mindfulness tool that will be implemented at Achieve Academy, various areas of mindfulness will be addressed and tools will be implemented to enhance behavior, social, and emotion skills.

## **AGENCY BACKGROUND**

Seneca Family of Agencies is a non-profit organization known for their care, treatment and services provided to youth and families seeking mental health services. The agency was founded in 1985 as Seneca Residential and Day Treatment Center. The founders seen that there was a need for mental health services for youth that were in foster homes and group homes. The agency also offered emotional support to families that were dealing with the emotional component of youth and their behaviors. The agency offered community-based, school-based and family-based mental health treatment and services to the families. In the 1990s, the agency later changed their name to Seneca Family of Agencies with the continued belief that *“it is not the youth that fail themselves but the system that fails youth by not offering services that are tailored to their specific needs”*. The agency also focused on becoming a system of care. In

addition, in 1984, the Kinship Center was created to support and build families where children experienced any form of abuse, neglect or trauma. The program ranges from its headquarters in Salinas, California to eleven other counties all over California. Furthermore, Canyon Acres which was founded in Anaheim, California was founded to support children transitioning from an abusive environment to a safe and healthy biological or adoptive environment that they would call their home. Canyon Acres offers both physical protection and mental health treatment to youth that may have been emotionally traumatized and promotes their goal of supporting all children to grow up and thrive in a strong and permanent family whether biological or adoptive. Kinship Center joined Seneca Center in 2011 to form Seneca Family of Agencies and later Canyon Acres joined in 2012 in order to create a collaborative system of care and support for children and their families.

The agency is funded by the government and receives donations monetary donations and time from individuals in the community who may want to give back. The mission of the organization is unconditional care, helping children and families through the most difficult time of their lives. The agency believes that through unconditional care, parent driven, strength-based service planning, individualized care, cultural competence and interagency collaboration, they are adequately able to serve the youth in the community efficiently and offer them the services that are tailored to serve their individual needs.

The services offered by Seneca are centered around mental health, education, permanency and innovation. All of the services reach the individual and the family of the individual. In some cases, the youth in need of services is in foster care or group homes. Seneca works with all parties involved to make sure they provide the necessary services. Seneca also partners with schools and other organizations to provide services.

One of Seneca's partnerships is with public and charter schools in urban areas that are in need of educational and behavioral services that assist with academic excellence. This program assists students having academic difficulties to transition into mainstream public schools with their peers while being able to deal with the various challenges that come with the new academic environment. The charter school I will be working with is Achieve Academy. Achieve Academy is a K-5<sup>th</sup> elementary school located in the heart of Fruitvale in Oakland, California. The school is comprised of a predominantly Hispanic population with a small percentage of students from the African-American and White populations. The charter school sits on the campus of an adjoining public school but is ran separately. The students who struggle academically or with repeated behaviors are assigned to work with Seneca clinicians and staff who have already implemented programs for those students centered around additional help with math and reading skills. The agency is staffed with Clinicians, Behavior Therapists, Behavior Coordinators and Behavior Specialists. The primary audience are youth and their families. Most are foster youth or youth that may have been in and out of group homes. The audience is also the family of the youth because Seneca wants to ensure that the family has the support they need to help the youth in need of specific services.

I plan to implement an On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practice program to address third grade students faced with behavior and academic challenges. The mindfulness based tool that I will create will allow the youth to manage their frustration and stress related to behavior, social, emotion, and attention regulation challenges they have. I will make community and classroom observations and conduct key-informant interviews with teachers and students and propose a mindfulness tool to be implemented by teachers with five brief mindfulness activities.

Since Seneca is committed to ensuring that the needs of the students at Achieve Academy are met, I intend to do the same with the program I plan to implement.

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND BASELINE DATA

**Overall demographics in Oakland Unified School District.** The total population of students in the 2016 – 2017 school year was 49,600. Oakland’s racial makeup is 41.3% Hispanic, 26.2% African American, 13.6% Asian, 11.1% White, 3.9% Multicultural Ethnicity, 1.1% Pacific Islander, 0.8% Filipino, 0.3% Native American, and 1.6% Not Reported. There are 123 OUSD District Run and District Authorized Charter Schools.

### **Demographics in the Oakland Unified School District (East Oakland Region).**

**Attendance.** The daily average attendance among students in the Oakland Unified School District is 95.44%. 11.1% of students were chronically absent. Geographically, 2.6% is the average distance traveled by student to school. 44.3% of students attended neighborhood schools.

**English Language Learners.** There were 30.8% of students who were English language learners. There is a total of 11,303 students that fall in this category with 58.9% being long term English Language Learners in grades 6-12.

**Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch.** There are 72.5% of students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. There are 49 schools with salad bars and 15 school base fresh produce markets. On average, 7,745 breakfasts were served daily and 19,948 lunches were served daily.

**Health and Wellness Services.** There were 6,513 students served at 16 school based health centers according to the 2015- 2016 data assessment profile of the Oakland Unified School District.

**Teacher Retention.** On average in the East Oakland region, 71% of teachers (15 of the 21) on site at each school returned for the upcoming school year.

**Suspension from school.** There were 4% of students who had one or more suspensions and 10.8% were African American male students.

**Baseline data.** Data on the various factors that contribute to the success of the student which includes demographics, attendance, English language learners, eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch, health and wellness services, teacher retention, and suspension from school.

## METHODS

Three methods of primary data collection were used to better understand the community. This included observations of the community and the classrooms, interviews with two teachers and two students. The first method of primary data collection was an observational walk-through tour of the Achieve Academy campus and observations of two third grade classrooms. I also took a wind-shield tour and walked around the neighborhood to determine the well-being of the community. Areas of assessment included: housing characteristics, access to food, parks and recreational space, safety, and community resources. Both wind-shield tour and walk-through tour of the neighborhood took place on a weekend afternoon. The observational walk-through tour of the Achieve Academy campus and observations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms occurred on a weekday afternoon. On the walk-through tour, community resource guides, pamphlets, and brochures were collected and examined to further determine services offered to the community.

The second method of primary data collection was two key informant interviews using a series of informal questions that were directed to the teachers of the third-grade classes that were conducted by the University of San Francisco fieldwork intern. Four teachers that work closely with the third-grade classes were approached and asked to participate in interviews due to

convenience sampling, but was only able to conduct interviews with two teachers since the others had limited time in their schedules. The aim of the interviews was to gain a better understanding of the priority population (students facing academic or behavior challenges) as well as the resources available to them, the challenges they face, and the factors that contribute to success outcomes. The teachers selected for the interviews specialize in teaching third grade which is the target group for this intervention. The interviews were conducted face to face. The intern spoke with each informant. To eliminate reporting bias clear notes were taken. In addition, the two third grade students offered their insights about their learning within the classroom. These interviews were conducted with students that had received disciplinary action and were sent specifically out of the third-grade class.

## FINDINGS

Overall findings from the observational walk through tour were that the Achieve Academy campus is a smaller charter school with about 200 students in grades K-5<sup>th</sup>. There are two classes of students for each grade level. There are two separate playgrounds for the smaller children and the older children. However, the playgrounds are run down and the equipment needs to be replaced. There are goal posts that the children use for soccer games without nets. There are also tether ball poles without balls. The classrooms are filled with about 25-32 students with individual desks that are aligned in about 6 rows from the front to the back of the classroom. The teachers oversee teaching and maintaining control of each student. In addition, the neighborhood consists of both low income and run-down apartments and houses. During the windshield tour, there were not many people walking around but a few exchanges were made between households and multiple cars pulled up throughout the tour. There are no large grocery stores or pharmacies in the immediate surrounding area of the school, but there is a Food Maxx

within a one mile radius of the neighborhood. Most of the food options available are either fast-food chains or taquerias. Popular businesses include liquor stores, mini-marts, cash and checking stores, laundromats, beauty/nail salons, and Metro PCS stores. Notably, all signs were in English, but the neighborhood is heavily influenced by a Hispanic population.

Several themes were identified throughout the interviews. Both informants felt a lack of empowerment among their students as a major concern for why the student act out in class or is unable to be successful academically. One teacher stated, *“There is a lack of empowerment that starts at home between the children and their parents and spills over into their academic performance causing them to feel like less of a student at school.”* The lack of empowerment identified in the student’s home setting and ultimately being carried over to their performance at school. This lack of empowerment appears in different forms whether through a language barrier or introduction to an unwelcoming environment where crime or domestic abuse plays a part. Additionally, one teacher stated, *“People can use mindfulness based techniques to improve their overall health whether it be mentally, physically, socially, emotionally and even financially.”* In addition, the other teacher stated, *“I try to do some sort of breathing with my class before we start our day and this is what I believe falls in the mindfulness category.”* Both key informants were able to identify and define what mindfulness-based techniques were and recognized the significant need for mindfulness based techniques in their classroom in order to improve the overall performance of their students. Teachers also stated that one limitation of implementing mindfulness based practices is that it may take up too much classroom time dedicated to other subject matter so they would need to be brief and immediate.

In addition, the students described their needs to do well in the classroom. One stated, *“It is hard to pay attention in class when I do not receive enough sleep at night or am feeling hungry*

*in class.*” The student expressed factors that were barriers to successful academic performance. The other student stated, *“I hate when students talk in class. I can’t pay attention and get my work done. When I ask them to be quiet, they tell me to shut up.”* The other student expressed concern around peer interactions and how talking among peers in class is disruptive in allowing work to be completed. Several themes also emerged in the student interviews that are parallel to themes identified when interviewing the teachers. The lack of empowerment stemming from the student’s home environment, social behavior interactions and external factors affecting academic performance were the prominent themes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the classroom and community observations, key informant interviews from two students and two teachers, the literature review, and other programs, the implementation of an On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practices tool is highly recommended for the students at Achieve Academy. Using mindfulness practices will improve the overall success outcomes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students at Achieve Academy. By implementing the On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practices, students will feel empowered to manage their behavior, social, emotion and attention regulation skills that contribute to overall classroom behavior and academic performance and allow teachers to minimize the amount of classroom time spent addressing behavior challenges.

## ON-THE-SPOT MINDFULNESS BASED PRACTICES TOOL

In developing an On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practice tool, it is necessary to have mindfulness based practices and exercises that are short, immediate and require some component of light physical activity presented in Table 1- On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities. These practices can be implemented at any time during the day. They would work best if implemented

in the morning before class, after breaks taken periodically during the day and before leaving class.

**Table 1- On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities**

| <b>Activity</b>                                       | <b>Description</b>   | <b>When to Implement</b>  | <b>How to Implement</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1. Breathing Exercises                                | This activity is implemented to minimize stress.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of the day</li> <li>• After lunch hour</li> <li>• Before leaving school</li> </ul> | Seneca staff or teacher leads students leads students into slow deep breaths at their discretion.  |
| 2. Mindful Emotions: Separating Good and Bad Emotions | This activity allows for differentiation of positive and negative behavior and social emotions of the student while enhancing self-awareness skills. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning of the day</li> <li>• After lunch hour</li> <li>• Before leaving school</li> </ul> | Seneca staff or teacher leads students by saying the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close your eyes</li> <li>• Try to draw the emotions you are feeling at the moment.</li> <li>• Add all of the colors that go with how you are feeling.</li> <li>• Keep the good emotions and release the bad ones.</li> </ul>  |
| 3. Mindful Yoga                                       | This activity allows for students to increase attention regulation skills.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During or after lunch hour</li> </ul>  | Seneca staff or teacher leads students into a series of movements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Say hello to the sun (student puts hands together above head)</li> <li>• Pretend to be a tree (student puts hands together above head and lifts one leg)</li> <li>• Pretend to be a flying bird (student bends forward lifting one leg behind them)</li> <li>• Pretend to be falling rain (student bends forward placing hands on the floor in front of them)</li> </ul> |
| 4. Mindful Role Play                                  | This activity will allow for students to improve on their behavior and social skills when interacting with peers.                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before leaving school</li> </ul>   | Students must be in small groups of 3 or 4 and act out a problem they experienced during the day and all students must come up with a better way to respond to the situation.  |

|               |   |   |   |
|---------------|---|---|---|
| 5. Meditation | This activity will allow for students to connect with their interpersonal self and improve the overall well-being of the student. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before leaving school</li> </ul> | Students will sit on top of their desk with legs crossed. They will imagine being on an island with their best friend. They will think about what they are doing, the weather and what items they have with them. |
|---------------|---|---|---|

The mindfulness activities described in the table above were developed, addressing the individual needs of the third-grade students at Achieve Academy. 1. Breathing exercises should be implemented to minimize stress at the beginning of the day, after lunch hour or before leaving school. It was developed with adaptations from the mindfulness-oriented meditation and active control trainings in a study conducted by Crescentini et al., (2016). This activity should be led by a teacher or a Seneca staff member. The implementer should lead a series of slow, deep breathing at their discretion and this activity would take three minutes to implement. 2. Mindful Emotions: Separating Good and Bad Emotions should be implemented to improve student differentiation of positive and negative behavior and social emotion the student is facing. It can be implemented at the beginning of the day, after lunch hour or before leaving school. It was also developed with adaptations from the mindfulness-oriented meditation and active control trainings in a study conducted by Crescentini et al., (2016). The teacher or Seneca staff member leading the activity will give the students four directions that will enhance their self-awareness skills and differentiation of good and bad emotions. This activity should take four to five minutes to implement. 3. Mindful Yoga focuses on increasing attention regulation skills. This would be best implemented during or after lunch hour. This activity was developed with adaptations from Meiklejohn et al., (2012) study on integration of mindfulness in K-12 and Kids Yoga Stories which provides easy yoga poses for children to follow. When leading this activity, it is best to

implement outside of the classroom in a quiet area. The students must have enough space to perform each movement. 4. Mindful Role Play allows for students to improve on their behavior and social skills when interacting with peers. This activity should be implemented before students leave school. The activity was developed with adaptations from the mindfulness-oriented meditation and active control trainings in a study conducted by Crescentini et al., (2016). When implementing, the teacher or Seneca staff member should pick randomized groups of three or four students to maximize effectiveness. Allowing students to work together to come up with solutions with random peers will increase behavior and social skills interactions in the classroom. 5. Meditation allows for students to connect with their interpersonal self and improve the overall well-being of the student. This activity should be implemented before students leave school. The activity was also developed with adaptations from the mindfulness-oriented meditation and active control trainings in a study conducted by Crescentini et al., (2016). When implementing this activity, students will sit on top of their desks with their legs crossed. They will imagine being on an island with their best friend. This activity will allow the student to improve overall well-being.

## DISCUSSION

After reviewing the data collected from the observations and the key informant interviews, it is appropriate to say that mindfulness based practices would improve the academic performance and behavior of many students at Achieve Academy. Since these practices would be applied to a wide range of students from kindergarten to fifth grade, it would have to be tailored to fit the specific needs of each grade level. These needs consist of stress management, behavior, social, emotional, and attention regulation skills while inside and outside of the classroom.

Although third graders were the focus for developing an On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practices tool, the techniques and practices could be applied with any grade level.

Implementing and practicing mindfulness exercises daily would not only encourage the students to manage their behavior, it would also allow for the teachers to have a more attentive classroom so that effective learning can take place without undesirable behaviors interrupting the classroom lesson. By conducting key informant interviews, the findings showed that teachers feel that students have a short attention span and are easily distracted by their peers. By implementing the On-The-Spot mindfulness techniques we can alleviate some of the distractions that ultimately affect the learning of the students. Findings from the observations were that both third grade classrooms were filled with between 25-32 students so it may be difficult for teachers to get the attention of the students or manage a larger class when a student is experiencing problems with their behaviors. When observing one of the third-grade classrooms, the teacher was engaged in mindfulness techniques with one of the students that had a conflict with another student in the class while the other students were engaged in conversation. The teacher had to get the attention of the students after working with one student. Unlike other mindfulness programs and classes, the On-The-Spot mindfulness techniques would be able to be implemented on the spot with a few quick exercises to choose from. The teacher or Seneca staff member would be able to implement these practices throughout the day while only taking a few minutes as opposed to a mindfulness course that has a series of classes focused on mindfulness practices.

There were several limitations associated with collecting data from a small sample size, accessing the classrooms and implementing the pilot program. The first limitation with collecting data was that while taking observational data, some of the students were trying to be on their best behavior so that they could be recognized for exemplary behavior. When looking at the validity

in measurements from the data collection, it is best to say that testing effects was present. The students displayed increase sensitivity and responsiveness to the observer in the classroom. Due to this occurrence of testing effects, it was difficult to see how the class behaved when not having someone observe the classroom. Also, the key informant interviews specifically focused on the students of those teachers so the reporting may have been biased so that it benefits their students and not so applicable to the other students. The second limitation was that I was not able to implement the pilot program in the classrooms. Due to the classroom schedules and limited classroom access, implementing and testing the pilot program was not possible.

#### FUTURE EVALUATION TO TEST PILOT IMPLEMENTATION

Baseline data will be collected from each participant using a pre-survey upon receipt of consent from the teachers and staff at Achieve Academy. Two 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classrooms will be observed, participate in a group discussion and participate in a Controlled Study. One classroom will be the controlled group or intervention group that receives the implementation of mindfulness-based techniques while the other group will not receive the mindfulness-based techniques. At completion of the intervention, participants will complete a post-intervention survey for immediate responses from the intervention. Teachers will also be asked to complete post surveys to measure effectiveness of implementation. Follow-up surveys will be administered to the teachers three months after the study to measure impact of implementation of mindfulness- based practices, social and emotional behavior, efficiency, self-efficacy, self-perception, and self-awareness of their third-grade classroom after implementation of the On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Practices.

## PRIMARY BASELINE VARIABLES

**Dependent Variable: Academic and Behavior Challenges.** Dimensions and indicators of obesity include lack of motivation, aggressive attitudes/behaviors, socioeconomic status, and student attitudes, perceptions and behaviors.

**Independent Variables: Mindfulness Based Techniques.** Dimensions and indicators include increased self-advocacy, increased motivation, stability of psychological, emotional and physical behavior.

**Demographics and Academic Performance.** During baseline data collection, participants will be asked their grade level, grades, parental education and socioeconomic status. School academic records will be used for academic performance measurement and response for whether participants eat the free lunch offered at school or have brought lunch every day for the past six months will be used for measurement of socioeconomic status.

**Classroom Behavior.** Baseline data collection will be taken through classroom observations. Two classes will be observed and the teachers will be

**Participant Attitudes, Perceptions and Behaviors.** Measurements will be taken from self-reported responses from the needs assessment surveys. Participation in school activities and lack of participation in school activities will be used for measurement.

## INTERMEDIATE AND OUTCOME VARIABLES

**Knowledge of Mindfulness-Based Techniques/Socioeconomic Status.** Lunch records of all participants will be gathered for measurement of daily diet along with self-reported responses from baseline data and follow-up surveys. Observational data will be collected during the study. Lunch records will also be an indicator of socioeconomic status as well.

**Self-Perception/ Efficacy and Knowledge of Mindfulness Based Techniques.** Data collection taken at baseline, during the post-study survey will be used to measure an increase in knowledge about mindfulness based techniques, self-efficacy and self-advocacy.

**School Activity Participation Level.** Participation in school sports and responses from the baseline data and follow up surveys will be used for measurement of increase in physical activity behaviors.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Seneca would benefit from implementing the On-The Spot Mindfulness Based Practices in the schools that receive their services. The On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities could be implemented in any classroom every morning to start the day, during lunch hour, before leaving school, when a classroom is experiencing behavior challenges or whenever needed throughout the day. The first recommendation is for Seneca staff to implement the pilot program designed to have On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities implemented throughout the day in two third grade classrooms. Following implementation, data would be collected on academic progress, attendance, and behavior. This data would track each student's progress as a result of mindfulness based practices. These mindfulness-based practices should be implemented before starting the curriculum for the day, after or during lunch, or before students go home to yield best results. The second recommendation would be to implement the On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities during lunch hour to all the students at the school. This method of implementation would take the pressure off of teachers to implement the mindfulness based practices during class time. This would eliminate any limitations teachers expressed concerning not having much time to implement or track data. This can be alleviated by having a member

from the Seneca staff implement the On-The-Spot Mindfulness Based Activities during the lunch hour, ensuring that it is scheduled daily during the duration of the pilot program.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH FOR IMPLEMENTATION

There are many areas where future research should be conducted. One area of research should be dedicated to mindfulness approaches in school and why implementing mindfulness based practices in elementary schools is important. There is a limited amount of data on how mindfulness based practices benefit the lives of children and adolescents when compared to the numerous studies and interventions that focus on how mindfulness based practices benefit adults. By focusing on implementation in elementary schools, we would further be able to determine if all children need mindfulness based practices or should it be implemented for specific populations that better benefit from them. Jayawardene et al., (2017) pointed out the limitation of reporting accuracy of the students in need of mindfulness based practices due to lack of knowledge of the severity levels of students with behavior difficulties and challenges. By learning more about this area of mindfulness based practices and techniques, support can be given to schools and teachers to make it more feasible to implement the mindfulness based practices in schools. In addition, research should be further conducted on behavior, social, emotional and health outcomes that are associated with mindfulness based practices and techniques. Mindfulness based practices would give teachers the option to have a proactive approach to addressing student challenges instead of a reactive approach. All in all, by presenting mindfulness based practices in schools, students would be introduced to a tool, directly catering to their needs, to manage their behavior that would be learned at an early age and used throughout the rest of their lives.

## Appendix

### Key Informant Interview Questionnaire

#### Two Third Grade Teachers

1. How would you describe your classroom dynamic?
2. Do any of your students face behavior challenges while in class that hinders academic success?
2. What are some factors that might be contributing to the behavior challenges faced by students in your classroom?
3. Have you ever heard of mindfulness based practices or techniques?
- 4.. Do you feel like your third-grade class would benefit from mindfulness based practices and techniques?

#### Two Third Grade Students

1. When do you get distracted in class?
2. What do you feel you need in order to do well in class?
3. Do other students distract you when you are in class?

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