

**PROJECT SMART PARTICIPANT TEAM REPORTS FOR FALL & SPRING SEMESTERS  
FOR CENTRAL SQUARE SCHOOLS WITH IHE CHRISTINE WALSH  
EDU 525 CREATING COLLABORATIVE SPACES FOR LEARNING**

**Participant's Names:** Brian Hatch, Megan Miller, Ellen Paradise at Central Square Middle School

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

Our eighth-grade team at Central Square Middle School adapted strategies on flexible scheduling and teaming in an effort to create a middle-school environment that supports students not only academically, but socially and emotionally, as well. We determined that to support these goals, students needed time in their schedule to meet as a whole team and begin to invest in each other in order to create an environment where students felt best able to meet their potential while practicing 21st Century Skills, such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity. We used these principles as a starting point for planning a bi-monthly "morning meeting" to help cultivate and support student learning. These meetings include team-building activities, character education, and self-reflective practices. In this action-research project we will gather evidence to see if team meetings increase student engagement in school.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

Our team of teachers felt there was a need to address student conduct--in and out of school--in a positive and pro-active manner that respected students' individual needs. Through the past few years, our team noticed that students lacked the skills necessary to navigate middle school successfully. We feel this is important work because if students can see the value of positive conduct, they will benefit academically, socially and emotionally. These skills are needs to be successful in high school and beyond.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

MONTHS	STEPS	PERFORMED BY
DEC 2017	--action plan created --create & administer initial survey to students	All team members
JAN 2017	--distribute team roster to colleagues who worked with students last year --identify students to participate in sample group --data collection: interviews with students and former teachers, guidance's and administrators), academics data, attendance records and disciplinary referrals	All team members
FEB 2017	--data collection continues	All team members
MAR 2017	--data collection continues --create & administer post survey to students --post-action data collection: interviews with students and former teachers, guidance and administrators), academics data,	All team members

	attendance records and disciplinary referrals	
APR 2017	--analyze data --record results	All team members
MAY 2017	--create professional development presentation/final report	All team members

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

- Pre- and Post-survey data
- Previous Staff Questionnaire
- Student Interviews
- Student Attendance and Disciplinary data for this school year and last
- Teacher learning will be documented through the completion of this project

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

We do not need additional resources to complete this project.

**UPDATE ON CHANGES TO TEAM ACTION PLAN:**

Our eighth-grade team at Central Square Middle School adapted strategies on flexible scheduling and teaming in an effort to create a middle-school environment that supports students not only academically, but socially and emotionally, as well. We focused on utilizing bi-weekly team meetings to increase student collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity. Our initial plan was to survey students on how their team functioned last year when they were in seventh grade and to have students revisit those questions based on their experiences from this year. We also planned on surveying teachers of the students while they were in seventh grade in order to compare their answers with our own. We also planned to conduct interviews with students identified through these surveys in order to see how they felt this year differed for them than last. We followed this plan, but we chose to not interview students because their responses were recorded on the survey responses.

**OVERALL CLAIM:** Team meetings increase student engagement in school.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING**

Team meeting was new to some of our students this year. Only 38 percent of students reported having team meeting last year, while this year, 100 percent of our students had team meeting. Some results are:

***Team Meetings increased students’ sense of team identity and community.***

In the pre-survey, 60.7 percent of students reported that their last year’s team had a strong sense of identity and community. In the post-survey, 79.3 percent of students reported that this year’s team had a strong sense of identity and community. This is an 18.6 percent increase.

***Team Meetings had a positive effect on student attendance.***

According to the survey completed by last year’s teacher 26 students on team were considered attendance issues. Of those students, 12 students are not considered attendance issue this year, according to school attendance data.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING**

***Although students may not perceive the effects of Team Meetings on their behavior, teachers have seen an improvement in student behaviors on team.***

According to the survey completed by last year's teachers, 16 students on team were considered behavior issues. Of those students, only 6 students are still considered behavior issues this year, according to current team teachers.

**Character traits should be implicitly taught as part of an activity.**

Almost all students (95.4 percent) were able to identify the team focus on character traits, however, only 37.9 percent said that this affected their behaviors. Also, only 27.6 percent of students reported enjoying character traits activities. Although students reported not appreciating the team's work on character traits, 34.5 percent of students reported they enjoyed watching videos associated with character traits and 41.4 percent appreciated the Students of the Month Awards, which are based on character traits. From this data, we would like to change the focus of next year's team meetings from explicit character trait instruction to building activities with implicit character instruction. We surveyed students, and many professed an interest using Break Out Boxes (55.2 percent); Team Spirit Activities (51.7 percent); STEM Activities (46 percent); and Community Service Projects (32.2 percent). We can ask students what they learn about character traits from completing these activities.

**Participant's Name:** **Scott Parish at Central Square Middle School**

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

By establishing a Mindfulness Center in my classroom, I will be creating a supportive emotional space that will be available to all students. The activities will be self-selected based on student interest and preferred mindfulness modalities (established through student survey/reflection – prior to using the Mindfulness Center).

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

As a seventh-grade teacher, I see students who struggle socially, academically, and emotionally. Several students have difficulty with the transition from sixth (elementary) to seventh grade (middle school), and the increased expectations and rigor that go along with this transition. Within the past year, I have had students deeply affected by the suicide of a sibling and the death of a mother, which resulted from a heroin overdose. I have a student with extreme Tourette's Syndrome and another who is emotionally disabled and becomes outwardly overwhelmed very quickly. All students are affected by the behaviors of other classmates.

I want to try different approach than I have in the past to help students deal with the stresses of their personal, emotional, and academic lives. I would like to encourage activities that help students' self-regulation practices (thoughts and behavior) and increase self and social-awareness (activities: breathing, relaxation techniques, creating a Mindfulness Center area within the classroom).

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

\*October through December:

- finalize Fall Action Plan
- research best-practices for mindfulness center activities
- create student mindfulness survey, directions for individual activities, and student self-reflections
- class discussion: What is mindfulness? What are its benefits? Etc.
- begin/end class with mindful breathing activities for all students

\*January through April:

- the mindfulness center is available to all students on an 'as needed' basis
- once a month we will have a 'mindfulness day' where all students will self-select a mindfulness strategy from the center and complete it.
- begin/end class with mindful breathing activities for all students

- gather data (student self-reflections)
- continue to modify Fall Action Plan

\*May:

- Finalize Teacher & Student Learning Report

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

The data that I collect will primarily be in the form of student self-reflections that they will complete at the mindfulness center. In this self-reflection, the following questions will be addressed:

\*before completing the mindfulness station activity:

- What's going on that you feel you need to use a mindfulness strategy? How do you feel before using the strategy?
- What mindfulness strategy will you choose?
- Why are you choosing this strategy?

\*after completing the mindfulness station activity:

- How do you feel after using the strategy?
- Will you use this strategy on your own in the future? If so, how?

Teacher learning will be documented in the form of a reflection journal.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

- various online resources
- strategies/information from Yoga ed. workshop completed in November

**UPDATE:** Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.

My students seemed reluctant to individually use the Mindfulness Center I established in my room. As a result, I had all students complete a whole-class monthly 'Mindful Moment' activity. This allowed all students to participate in some of the activities of the Mindfulness Center.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:** I examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).

The 'Mindfulness Center' wasn't launched until January, though we began each class with a mindful breathing/stretching activity. Students could choose to do this or not, but they needed to sit quietly and respect other students who were participating.

**Summary of Results:**

- Mindful breathing/stretching provided a smooth transition from the chaos of the hallway, lockers, getting to class on time, etc., to our classroom activities. Students were better able to adjust to beginning of class routines (settling down, reviewing learning targets, getting out materials, etc.) Even though I gave away one minute to mindful breathing/stretching, the class actually gained 2-4 extra minutes of overall instructional time through smoother transitions.
- 3/4 of students participated in mindful breathing/stretching activities in January. That number has increased to almost 100% in most classes by May. I did notice that more students participated in my morning classes than my afternoon.

- Students were reluctant to use the Mindfulness Center independent of our whole-class mindfulness work. I intend on surveying students as to why at the end of the school year. Since January, I only had two students use the center independently.
- Though many students report feeling an improvement in overall mood, feelings, and attitudes after completing a mindful activity, only 17% 'would' use the strategy in the future to be more self-aware and to self-regulate. Only 37% would 'maybe' use the strategy, while 51% 'would not' use it. I found this surprising, as my assumption would be that students would choose an action that they themselves proved to be beneficial.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:** I examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following: (Give examples/evidence for each claim).

The data that I collected is in the form of student self-reflections that were completed during our monthly, whole-class, mindful moment activities. In this self-reflection, the following questions were asked and addressed:

*\*before completing the mindfulness moment activity:*

- How would you rate your overall mood, feelings, attitude, etc. before our mindful moment activity? (positive, neutral, or negative)
- Explain how you feel before using the strategy? Be specific.

*\*after completing the mindfulness moment activity:*

- How would you rate your overall mood, feelings, attitude, etc. after our mindful moment activity? (positive, neutral, or negative)
- Explain how you feel after using the strategy? Be specific.
- Will you use this strategy on your own in the future to help you be more self-aware and self-regulate?

- Student learning was documented in the form of google forms and google sheets.
- Teacher learning was documented in the form of a reflection journal.

**The data from the above questions, indicated the following: (\*data numbers of whole-class mindful moment activities were averaged from February-May)**

*\*before completing the mindfulness moment activity:*

- How would you rate your overall mood, feelings, attitude, etc. before our mindful moment activity? (positive, neutral, or negative)
  - positive = 24%
  - neutral = 51%
  - negative = 21%

*\*after completing the mindfulness moment activity:*

- How would you rate your overall mood, feelings, attitude, etc. after our mindful moment activity? (positive, neutral, or negative)
  - positive = 43%
  - neutral = 42%
  - negative = 16%

- Will you use this strategy on your own in the future to help you be more self-aware and self-regulate?

- yes = 17%
- maybe = 32%
- no = 51%

### **Summary of results:**

- The vast majority of students, 75%, did not rate themselves positively (in regard to mood, feelings, and/or attitudes) prior to completing mindful activities. 51% of students rated themselves as neutral, and 21% rated themselves as negative. In contrast, only 24% rated themselves as positive.
- After completing mindful activities, 43% of students rated themselves as positive (in regards to mood, feelings, and/or attitudes), with 42% neutral and 16% negative.
- Mindful activities helped students maintain a positive rating and also increase positive ratings by 19%. Neutral ratings decreased by 9%.
- Despite the increase in positive ratings, only 17% of students said that they would use mindful activities in the future, with 32% saying they maybe would, and 51% would not use them.

**Participant's Names:**

**Jessica Lynn & Margaret Saunders at Brewerton Elementary**

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

Our intention is to provide empowerment strategies to emotionally at-risk students, to improve the learning environment for all in the affected classrooms. Students will be able to use the coping strategies in the classroom and at home.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

There is an increase in students who do not have adequate coping skills. Their emotional responses and/or outbursts negatively affect the classroom environment. We will provide these students a variety of strategies and share them with teachers and parents for reinforcement.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

January – February – Meet with students once a week for 6 weeks in an afterschool setting. Providing snacks and a gonoodle activity at every meeting. Students leave with a strategy and a questionnaire for parents.

1<sup>st</sup> week- Introduction to mindfulness- Have students take survey of feelings/stress levels. Share video on what happens to our brains when under stress. Introduce mindfulness & 4-7-8 breathing.

2<sup>nd</sup> week- Reflect on use of 1<sup>st</sup> strategy. Celebrate successes, collect feedback forms. Introduce 2<sup>nd</sup> strategy, <http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetailsKids.aspx?p=335&np=287&id=1505>

3<sup>rd</sup> week- Reflect on use of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> strategy. Celebrate successes, collect feedback forms. Introduce 3<sup>rd</sup> strategy. In the moment strategy

4<sup>th</sup> week- Reflect on 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> strategy. Celebrate successes, collect feedback forms. Introduce 4<sup>th</sup> strategy. Using the arts to be mindful- music "Weightless" on YouTube, or drawing.

5<sup>th</sup> week- Reflect on 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> strategy. Celebrate successes, collect feedback forms. Introduce 5<sup>th</sup> strategy. Acknowledge feelings without reacting

6<sup>th</sup> week- Reflect on 1<sup>st</sup>- strategy. Celebrate successes, collect feedback forms. Introduce 6<sup>th</sup> strategy. Yoga- (maybe ask classmate to lead a yoga activity) Exercise to get out excess feelings. Ending survey. Ask teachers for ending survey.

Possibly do a round 2.

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Student survey. - Beginning & Ending (longer), shorter weekly weeks 2-5

Teacher Survey - Beginning & Ending- weekly brief survey

Parent Survey. - Beginning & Ending- weekly brief survey

Jo Moskal, Brent Bowden and Deb Ostrowski initial student recommendation and meeting to discuss improvements.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

Snacks for students (PTO?)

**UPDATE:** Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.

Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:

We provided one after school activity for students in need of emotional support. In our classrooms, we provided students with the same strategies. We continue to reinforce the skills in our rooms. We also shared our after-school activity as professional development with other teachers in our building.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:** We examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).

The time spent purposefully teaching mindfulness (strategies to name emotions, what to do about their emotions and who is a safe person to talk to) lessens the emotional outbursts, which provides more time for academics in the classroom.

We found that we could spend more time teaching and less time handling emotional outbursts. The children were proactive in meeting their needs and more resilient when emotionally upset. As the duration of episodes decreased, the feeling of tension in the room was almost eliminated. Students are very empathetic to the fact that things happen beyond our control and that can be frustrating. It was encouraging to see the students reinforcing these strategies through reminders such as "give yourself a hug with those crossed arms". The parents also provided feedback that the time was well spent as the children were excited to share their papers with their families and continued to use them as resources. We presented our findings during a building professional development day. We asked the teachers to complete a survey before the presentation.

How often does a child come to you crying?

Every day 32% Once a week 32% Once a month 24% Never 12%

How often does one of your students come to school upset (hindering his/her ability to complete classwork)

Every day 40% Once a week 36% Once a month 24% Never 0%

How often does a student in your classroom shut down and distract others?

Every day 56% Once a week 12% Once a month 28% Never 4%

Do you feel there is a need in our school for Social-Emotional learning? Yes 100%

Would you feel comfortable with an administrator walking into your room during a mindful moment (brain break etc.)? Yes 92% No 8%

We also had the teachers complete a survey after the presentation.

Do you think your entire class would benefit from Social Emotional Learning? Yes 100% Do you feel that you have the time for working with students in this area? Yes 92%

Did you find this presentation helpful? Yes 100%

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following: (Give examples/evidence for each claim).

From the data listed above, we found that as we increased the classroom's social emotional awareness, the academic learning environment became more collaborative. Providing students with alternatives and strategies, to curb emotional outbursts, decreased the amount of time that was spent calming an upset child. We also found that other students were willing to collaborate with children who had outburst tendencies because they were prepared with encouraging words, as compared to peer avoidance. For example, a student who learned the strategy to hug himself to feel his love when he was frustrated, instead of shutting down. We received very appreciative and positive parent feedback.

**Teacher Participant Names:** Heather Ladd & Rebecca Williamson at Central Square Middle School

**Action:** Describe specifically how mindfulness practices and/or mindful literacy and language are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support a learning community.

We are using mindful practices through content related videos at the beginning of class to help students concentrate and bring students to a mindful place for class

**Rationale:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

We realize that we lose time in class from students who walk in and are not ready to learn because they are thinking about other things or are interested in socializing. We would like to explore exercises that will help our students be more focused, decrease time wasted, cut down on interruptions and get kids to stay engaged in the lesson.

**Responsibilities/Timeline:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

**December** - Williamson/Ladd - Write data on classes that are posing the most difficulty. Writing the date, class, minutes wasted, the number of interruption whether the group was following classroom routines, and their engagement level.

**January** - Williamson/Ladd - Implement techniques for mindfulness with the classes. Keeping track of the date, class, minutes wasted, the number of interruption whether the group was following classroom routines, and their engagement level.

**February** - Williamson/Ladd - Discuss the data and write up report



**Evaluation:** What data will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

We will write the date, class, minutes wasted, the number of interruption whether the group was following classroom routines, and their engagement level, for both before and after mindful exercises are implemented.

Williamson and Ladd will write learning from the experiment as they are working on it.

We will listen for student comments and perceived changes in the class behaviors

**Resources:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

We will need the data collection sheet

We are using practices that we have discovered on line that fits our comfort level and what we believe our students will respond to.

**UPDATE: Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.**

We made one change to our team action plan. We started out using generic mindfulness videos for children on YouTube. The results that we were getting were ok, but we believed we could do better. We eat lunch with several colleagues and we were discussing our research and data. It was through this discussion that someone suggested using content-related videos. We did some research and found a plethora of videos and had an “A-ha!” moment. Students really enjoyed those videos rather than concentrating on their breathing, feet on floor, etc.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING: We examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).**

Students enjoy a content related activity that is relevant to the learning and the atmosphere of the room rather than guided breathing or the type of guidance that is typically found under mindful activities for classroom.

Students were not as receptive to mindful breathing exercises as compared to a video or activity that is more relevant to the content area.

In art Philip Williamson, another art teacher at the middle school, had students watch videos by Marcello Barenghi. Students were highly engaged and would watch the plethora of videos this artist has out on hyper realism. On down times students went to the sights on their own and tried to draw the pieces. Students shared these sights and I had students have hyperrealism drawings in their sketchbooks as well.

Heather did various mindful drawing exercises with her students. A particularly engaging activity was the first one that was introduced. Students were asked to pick a picture and then put it in a container. They were then asked to draw the picture. Half way through drawing students were told they could look at the picture for thirty seconds and then start drawing again. At the end a discussion happened about the difference between just picking a picture and “looking” at a picture in order to draw it. The students really understood this concept and I explained that we were engaged in mindfulness. It was an “aha” moment for the students that mindfulness didn’t just have to be about deep breathing.

Becky had a couple of different units that I showed videos for. My students loved the Tasty videos that are popular on Facebook. They are all about cooking. They are very short, edited nicely and give the students a general idea of what is being made. Students spoke to me about trying them at home with limited success. Because of the editing, it does make recipes seem a little bit easier than they can be, but I encouraged students to get help from an adult at home and try it again.

The other successful set of videos that Becky showed were in her sewing unit. She had several stitches that she uploaded to Schoology. Students had three that they must include on their project. The other videos they could watch for part of their extra credit. The required videos were used as a mindful moment at the beginning of two different class periods. What Becky observed is that students really enjoyed learning the stitches that were not required and even if they were not using them for an extra credit project, they would watch them anyway.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:

Date	Minutes Wasted	#of Interruptions	Following class routine	Engagement
12/1	1-2	1-2	yes	Most
12/4	0	0	Most	yes
12/5	1-2	0	most	all
12/6	0	0	yes	most
12/14	4	3+	some no	many
12/19	1-2	0	yes	Many
12/20	1-2	0	yes	Many
1/2	0	1-2	yes, to start	all
1/3	1	0	better	yes
1/4	0	0	yes	yes
1/8	0	3	most	most
1/9	0	0	yes	yes
Becky				
12/18	4	4	some no	10 fully
12/21	3	0	better	18 fully
1/3, 1st day of mindfulness	5	5	5 not following	most, 1 student eating
1/4	4	5	3 not following	half
1/8	3	2		
1/9	4	0	6	all
1/10	0	0	0	all
1/11	1	3	4	once started, all were
2/6 new class	5	4	8	20
2/8	4	2	3	21
2/27	4	5	5	18-20
3/1	3	2	3	21
3/6	2	1	4	25
3/8	2	0	2	26/27
3/13	4	2	3	

When you analyze the data, you can clearly see that after teaching the students mindfulness practices, there was less down time at the beginning of class, less students off-task and more engagement. This led to great teacher happiness because we were not stressed for time and had better behaving students. What I don't think is clear from the analysis is the impact that switching from generic mindfulness videos for children to content-related videos had on the plan. That data did not show up on our table, however, it showed up in the attitude of

our students. Evidence for this is in their comments such as, "We're not doing mindfulness today? Why not?" "Are we doing mindfulness today?" "Yes, I love doing it." "What video are we watching for mindfulness today?"

Student learning that went on during this data collection is difficult for us to ascertain. We finally decided that the student learning that went on was what is mindfulness? How can mindfulness be used to help us focus? How do we do mindfulness? We didn't have that as part of our data collection, but we know it did take place.

**Participant's Names:** Kelly Mascaro & Janice Mullin at Central Square Middle School

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

Do Mindful activities help students' interpersonal skills?

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

We wish to improve learning environments and students' collaborative skills. We feel that students need soft skills and will be focusing on active listening, drawing consensus/compromise, recognition and respect for all contributors, and eliciting views from reluctant group members.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

November;

Video of group work prior to beginning mindful activities

Student Questionnaire: "Do you like to work with other students? Why? Do you feel stress when working with others? Why?"

Teach/model collaboration, continue collecting data about the group dynamics in the classroom

Dec. and January;

Add mindful practices (breathing activities (deep belly breathing, breath of joy, grounding activities), mindful moments from a variety of apps such as Serenity (timer with chimes and you can add music to your timer) Relax - guided meditations, Breathe, The Mindfulness app. has silent and guided meditations, and also personalized meditations. and Breathe.

Survey students: "What activities help you the most? Do you feel like you have more self-control? Do you feel more likely to help others? Do you want to work with others? Do you see a change in others? How do you feel?"

*Throughout Project:* Journal what we see in change (or not)

Video students before final survey to see if it worked. (April)

Survey students again about their feelings/attitudes about collaboration and mindfulness.

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

We will be video-taping students and analyzing the tapes, administering surveys, teacher will journal observations and after viewing videos.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

We will need to video the students, other than that, nothing extra will be needed.

## UPDATE:

We kept to the original plan with one exception. Kelly Mascaro also added some more intensive review/teaching of collaborative norms/expected behavior during group work. These expectations were developed by the group members themselves.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:

- We observed that Mindful Moments did have a positive effect on the behaviors of the students. We observed the changes in behaviors and collaborative work. We found differences based on the many variables, such as group dynamics, time of day and class make up.
- Mascaro: I questioned if the Mindful Moments were the causal effect on the changes in behaviors or if it was the teaching of the Collaborative Norms that brought about the changes I saw. I felt that both have an effect on the student's ability to work productively together and that more research will need to be done in order to determine this.
- Mullin: I also saw many positive effects, but I was troubled by my inability to get all of my class members to participate and in some instances found that the students that would not participate distracted other members of the class that enjoyed the mindful moments. The student responses illuminated some of these problems, yet at the same time many students want to do these mindful moments every day and find them very helpful. I feel that if I begin these techniques at the beginning of the school year I will have more success. As I get more comfortable with the process, I believe my students will see more of the benefits.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:

Student Survey: The students had mixed views of whether or not the mindful moments helped them when they were collaborating. Some believed it did help when dealing with others, and other students did not think it did. Some said it helped them personally but did not perceive it as helping the group work.

The observations of student's behaviors show more time on task (and it was progressive, it didn't happen overnight, but over a course of 5-7 weeks). We saw more time on task, less 'in-fighting' and generally a more positive and supportive classroom.

Participant's Name: **Angela Enigk at Central Square Middle School**

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

My project is to create a flexible and mindful learning environment for the students of the middle school library. I plan on creating a space for all learners to go to for academic purposes, group presentations, classes and for their mindful health. I hope to also have resources and techniques they can use in the space provided to improve their mindful health.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

This is important because the library is evolving, and I want students to have a place to get work done, collaborate with others and practice mindful techniques. I have witnessed students struggling to be able to relax and take a minute for themselves in order to then focus on being productive in other ways. I have also seen how students can benefit from having a more welcoming environment in which they can feel at home.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

1. Have mindful strategies on ways they can relax and let their mind focus on cardstock and placed on the tables in table holders.
  - Research effective mindful techniques students can use independently.
  - Establish a mindful environment during 4th and 5th grade advisements where there is a need to have multiple settings.
2. Have student quotes placed up around the room in various picture frames. Quotes are generated by students and will be focused on the character education themes of the month. (January, February, March...on going as quotes come in each day)
  - Talk to Pam Wincheck guidance office in permission rights to have student quotes generated on cardstock in picture frames.
  - Email staff on donating any old picture frames they are no longer using, for our quote wall
3. Paint the library walls with new colors that are conducive to a relaxing mindful environment. (February or April Break)
  - This will be carried out by maintenance over a vacation. Paint will be purchased through district funds? Or library funds? Will need to research this.
4. Purchase some flexible seating options and tables that can be moved for a collaborative space or a space that is appropriate for large groups and small groups to work on assignments or read. (December/January with leftover budget and May with new budget)
  - Email Stacey Gleason on vendors and prices of flexible seating
  - Look into budget numbers and see what can be afforded this year
  - Design a space and talk to administration on what I want the library to look like
5. Create a resources area of mindful techniques, general mental health guides or pamphlets, where students can get help and a graffiti board they can express emotions or answer weekly topic questions.

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

I do not have any scheduled courses in the library, so data is driven by the attendance that comes in during advisements, lunch, study halls and other times teachers send students. Students are constantly different in the library, and I have a completely flexible schedule. I plan on creating a few ways to gather data from the 6th grade students who do visit.

1. I will have students participate in a survey about the library and what they feel would make the library a place that they would want to come to. The survey would also focus on what they want to get out of the library, and what their current feelings are when they come to the library. I would do this using google forms.
2. Document on a notepad the behaviors of my 6<sup>th</sup> grade students during a busy academic and achievement times. Document how behaviors change or remain the same during these busy periods.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

- I will need funding for flexible seating and tables
- I will need paint and maintenance staff to paint the walls, will need to research calm colors that create a peaceful environment.
- I will need to gather and purchase materials for self-help, mindful ways to deal with stress, ways to join clubs, and self-help materials.

**UPDATE:** Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.

My team action plan has remained the same for the most part. One thing I did add to my flexible mindful place is an area to create some makerspace type activities for students to unwind and reflect on their feelings.

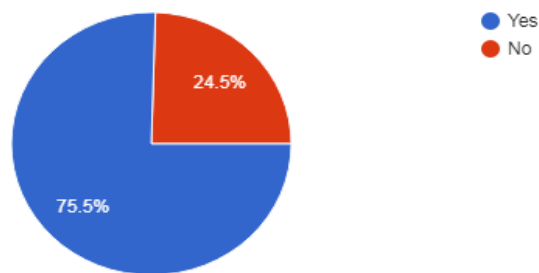
The actual physical space aspect of my research has taken some time to get approved by administration and most of it won't be complete until just before the findings are to be reported in this report. So, some of my data may be incomplete due to the time constraints that I was proposed with.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:** We examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).

I found students to be stressed at school. According to my Google Form, the data showed 75.5% of students feel some sort of stress while in school. This proves my rationale that students could use a place to practice some mindful practices and have a place to get work done in de-stressing.

Do you feel stressed while in school?

106 responses

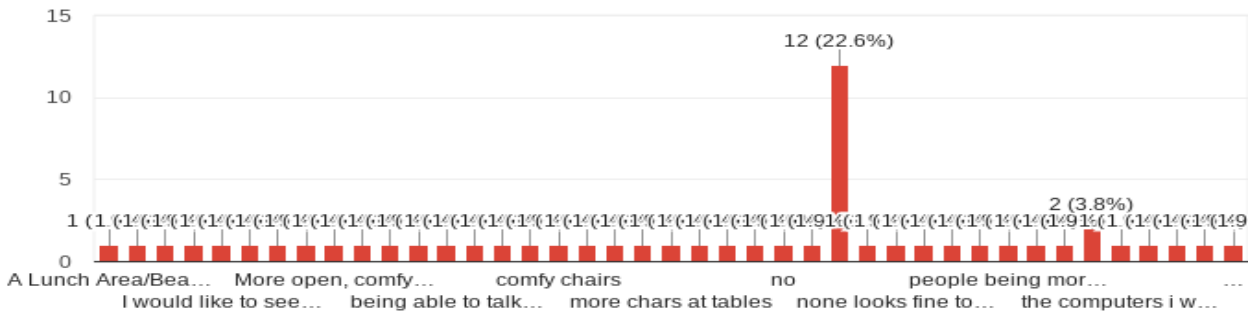


In my Google Form findings 50% of students feel stressed outside of school as well. Meaning some students feel stressed for the majority of their day if they are feeling stressed both inside school and outside school and a large majority feeling stressed at least during the day.

In my Google Form I found students to want a space that was collaborative, had comfortable seating, was a place they could relax, and talk with peers. Although this chart has many different responses, it does show a big demand for comfortable seating and relaxing environment. If I had to redesign the survey, I would not allow for open ended answers and add relaxing environment and comfortable seating as my options. This chart does mention a lot of students responding as not wanting to see any changes. In fact, 22% were happy with how the library was organized. I do think the structure of the question lended to more responses to "none" being the number one answer. If I tally the number of students who wrote in "other" answers I think that number would be different.

## What areas of the library would you like to see changed and how would you change them?

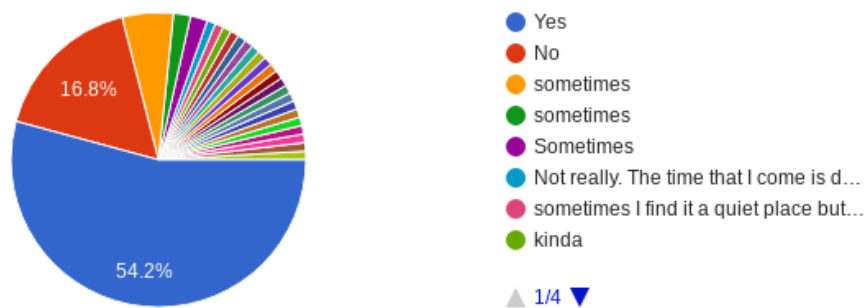
53 responses



Another finding in my google Form was that students were split on whether the library was a quiet place to work. 54% stated they thought the library was a quiet place, and the other half had differing answers which all led to the library not being a quiet place to work. After some of the strategies I used for a mindful space I observed the library to be a quieter area where students seemed on task. I did have areas where students could collaborate, but for the most part advisement students were working independently and utilizing the space that was created.

## Do you find the library to be a quiet place where you can work and read?

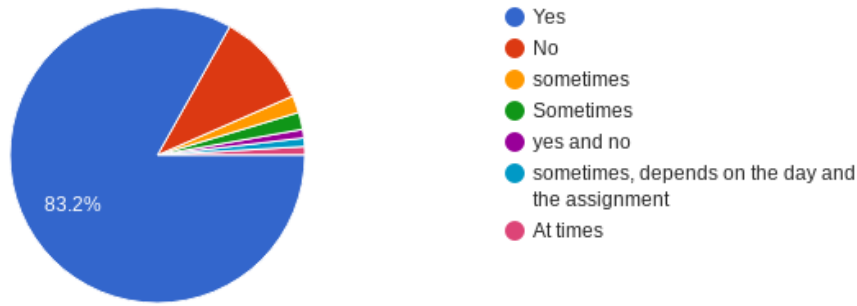
107 responses



Students in the Google Form believed that the library was a place they could collaborate and work with others. I didn't observe too much change with this after I implemented my changes. This was an area I did not feel like I had a lot of time to collect data on as well as my flexible seating options came the week before this project was due. I think with time this could have been explored more.

## Do you find the library to be a place you can collaborate and work with others on projects?

107 responses



**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following: (Give examples/evidence for each claim).

In my research I changed the physical properties of the library. I disposed of some old books, cleared walls to be painted with brighter colors, spaced out tables and created nooks where students had their own “space”. I have observed students in a calmer state and working on different assignments for school. It would seem students are more comfortable being spread out with their various groups of friends and they tend to stay on task. It’s hard to tell completely if the physical movement of students helped with this calmer state or if students having their own 1-1 device has contributed to their calm behavior. Both the movement and Chromebooks came at about the same time.

In the reconfiguration of the physical space of the library, I ordered 2 new tables on casters along with 4 sets of “oodle” seating. The tables are waiting to be assembled, but the “oodles” are out and students are drawn to them. An oodle is a seat that can rock or sit stationary. The seats are screwed together and can sit independently or all together.

In my observations I have heard students say, “wow these are so cool”. I’ve observed students working at the tables and unconsciously moving back and forth on them while staying on task working.



In my action plan I noted that we would display student quotes in picture frames and place around various parts of the room. In my research I noted that students took time to read these quotes, and observe what others had to say about character traits the school was trying to promote. As far as behaviors and mindfulness goes I did not observe any changes.



Some of the flexible tables that were ordered were not assembled in time for the data to be compiled. This was mostly because they took so long to be delivered. In addition, our district is short on maintenance and we did not have anyone to assemble. I do hope to get them up and going in the coming weeks. So, I didn't observe much change or data with that.

The painting was completed after April Break, so I had about a week of data I could compile with that. Students were observed asking me "what changed?" Some students came in and said they "LOVED" the paint. It looked so "sophisticated, warm and inviting". Teachers were observed saying it felt professional and inviting. Students immediately wanted to sit on that side of the library with pals.

I added some makerspace activities on that side including create your own poem, mindful coloring and a space for snap circuits. Students did come and use the three dedicated spaces throughout the time period they were set up. Students who sometimes didn't have much to do were observed utilizing these spaces. It seemed like another great way to use their time and let them unwind a bit.

### **Additional Pictures and charts to support research:**

#### **Before Pictures**



**(library wall with empty bookshelf)**



**(original comfy chairs area with cluttered tables, bare walls)**

Participant's Name:

Collette A. Richmond

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

According to the text, *Fostering Resilient Learners: Strategies for Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* (Souers & Hall, 2016), "If we aren't physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, we cannot reasonably expect to be able to help our students become healthier and more successful in school" (p. 40). As teachers, embodied learning must occur within ourselves first and foremost. The more that we are able to demonstrate the benefits of embodied learning, the more it will carry over into the classroom and affect students in a positive way.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

This work is important because I have to achieve a sense of self-awareness so that I can see ways to be an effective teacher and colleague even though I work in several different buildings with a variety of colleagues with minimal opportunity for collaboration, which I thrive upon. I am concerned that my limited amount of true connections with students (and teachers) on a daily basis results in my feeling ineffective because I feel that I am not impacting learning. I have so much passion and energy for teaching and collaboration, but it is not being used, and it is making my job unenjoyable. In short, I need to find my purpose and I need to see beyond myself in order to find it, or to see that my purpose lies within me.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

January – March: Establish the "when, where, and how" of mindful communication; explore the qualities of a mindful teacher (compassion, understanding, boundaries, attention, intention, authenticity) by journaling

April: Continue to explore, evaluate, and assess my growth.

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

My written reflections and observations in the classroom will document my learning and growth.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

Suggested web resources and texts, such as *The Way of Mindful Education: Cultivating Well-Being in Teachers and Students* by Daniel Rechtschaffen (2014).

**UPDATE:** Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.

There were no changes to my action plan.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:** We examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).

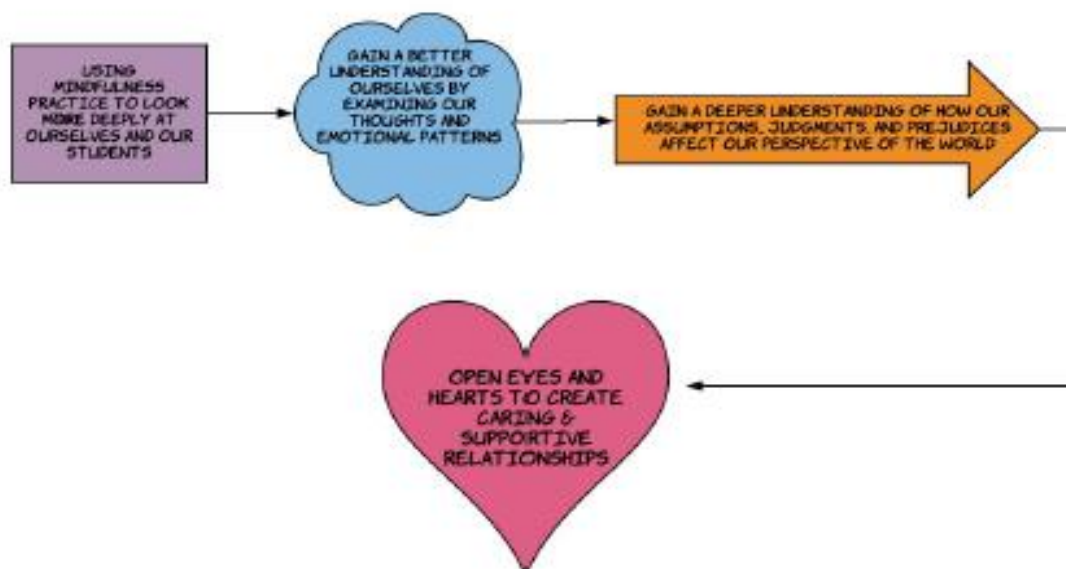
Having to work in so many different buildings these past 2 years, I have been dealing with the fact that I don't have an "inner circle" at work due to a lack of collaborative relationships. Consequently, I feel no sense of belonging. As a result of my journaling, I have changed my perspective of how I view the things that I have experienced, and I have become more aware of my physical, mental, and emotional conditions.

Through reflective journaling, reading the class text as well as additional texts, and introspection, I have learned to let go of what I can't do (or am not getting) and focused on what I can do or give.

Throughout the journaling process, I explored the following qualities of a mindful teacher and have included excerpts from my journal for each:

- ★ Compassion: “So, my using a compassionate lens changed a situation that could have been confrontational, and it allowed me to help calm the student down and get him refocused, while at the same time providing him with some new wisdom that he will hopefully remember the next time he is in that situation.” (2/28/18)
- ★ Understanding: “As a person and as a professional, I am highly reflective, sometimes too reflective to the point of obsession, but this visual helps to break down the process. I think this process is helpful because it allows me to see situations from a different perspective, so I can remove myself from it and make an appropriate, effective decision based on current circumstances. Sometimes I quickly forget to do that and go into panic or depressed mode.” (3/14/18)

The following is a visual that I created to use in my presentation based on the Rechtschaffen text:



- ★ Boundaries: “...in order for us to be able to provide boundaries for our students, we first have to be able to demonstrate that we can maintain our internal boundaries.” (4/3/18)
- ★ Attention: “It is amazing how quickly that can happen and sabotage my presence to the world. Sometimes it occurs when I least expect it, and I really have to try not to allow it to distract me when I’m in the moment.” (4/17/18)
- ★ Intention: “When I changed my perspective to reflect my intentions rather than my expectations, it made a huge impact, and for that, I am very thankful!” (4/25/18)
- ★ Authenticity: “Some people might argue that if you are too vulnerable, then your students won’t respect you. I think that you have to find that balance and communicate your expectations to your students. Each student is unique and will connect in a different way, so the best approach is to get to know them.” (5/7/18)

I have determined the following findings:

- ★ I learned to focus on what I can do in the moment so that I can be present for students who might need me for support.

- ★ I have learned to appreciate the little things, such as working with a student who needs help or just receiving a wave or a “Hi, Ms. Richmond” in the hall from students.
- ★ It’s a conscious effort to stay out of my own head when I’m not supposed to be there! For example, when something doesn’t go my way, I begin to panic and lose sight of what’s in front of me.
- ★ I “slowed down my mind and dropped into my heart.” This allows me to change my perspective of the situation and make an effective decision on how to provide support in that situation.
- ★ My using a compassionate lens changed a situation that could have been confrontational. I made a connection with my prior training with Cognitive Coaching, where there are several different lenses through which I can look to evaluate a situation.
- ★ Distinguishing between intentions and expectations. This was one of the things that I struggled with at the beginning of this process, and fortunately, I am able to know and understand the difference now.
- ★ Authenticity is completely raw emotional vulnerability. I have received confirmation that it is ok to show students your vulnerability and humility. A colleague and former supervisor taught me the importance of ‘intellectual humility’ and it is applicable in the professional setting as well as in the classroom setting.
- ★ I was able to apply the qualities I was exploring to situations I was experiencing every day, and they easily fit. I believe that my work with this project helped me to see the situations as they arose.
- ★ Perspective is everything! My perspective has changed, and I have more patience to make sure that I am seeing a particular situation from different perspectives, so I can give of myself and my expertise.

Here is an excerpt from early on in the process:

“I’d like to examine what changed for me. I think that maybe I stopped trying to “force” myself on people and just focus on what I can do in the moment. I am really trying to make connections with the kids, and I am finally seeing them making connections with me. I love it when I go into a classroom for the first time, and students draw me pictures or write me notes telling me I’m the best teacher. I also love that even though I may have only spent an afternoon with them, they still remember me and wave to me in the hall. It’s the little things that I am learning to appreciate.” (2/2/18)

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following: (Give examples/evidence for each claim).

As a result of my introspection, I believe that I have forged relationships with students who lacked confidence for whatever reason and I have given them confidence to be successful in their work as students and peers. I have also opened a door for them so that they know they can always come to me for help without any judgment, and I have established these relationships at many of the schools in which I have worked. Finally, I am able to model the tools that I have explored and discussed for students with the hope that they will also learn to use these tools to be more mindful in their thoughts and actions moving forward.

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

What techniques can be implemented to make GRAIR time more productive and academically useful?

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

Three students (ADHD/ODD, Autism Spectrum, Learning Disability) are not functioning in the classroom setting. They do not follow classroom rules or expectations. They are disruptive to their peers and hinder learning for most students in the classroom. Teachers spend an abundance of time redirecting student behaviors during lessons. ICT has become one teach, one manage behaviors.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

September/October/November – document observed behaviors, monitor daily behaviors using Class Dojo

December/January/February – implement Mindfulness, cooperative learning, project-based learning/student choice opportunities (choice boards), practice efficient transitions

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Teacher observations and feelings on success of lessons

Student surveys on feelings about classroom during GRAIR (volume, chaos, feelings of success)

Class Dojo

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

Class Dojo

GoNoodle

Mindfulness techniques

## UPDATE:

**What techniques can be implemented to make GRAIR time more productive and academically successful?**

### Rationale:

Our project was focused on improving the classroom environment in our second-grade class, primarily during GRAIR time. The personalities and behaviors of some of our students made it difficult for us to work with our small groups without having to continuously stop instruction to redirect or diffuse unwanted or unsafe behaviors. This was hindering learning of all students in the classroom and we were feeling very stressed and did not feel that we were able to teach effectively.

Our GRAIR block is a very busy time of the school day. The time was broken up into 3 centers that the students rotate through, two being run by teachers and one being an independent center. Also, four students

who are a part of our Foundations program also push into the classroom at this time and bring along 4 teaching assistants and the Foundations classroom teacher. Additionally, a building teaching assistant and a frequent parent volunteer are also in the room working with students at this time. There were always distractions and situations that were hindering student learning.

One of the biggest hindrances to student learning was the behaviors of three specific students. These three students were new to our school due to district consolidation and redistribution of the schools. In their previous school, it was always recommended that these three students were not placed into the same classroom due to their disruptive behaviors, but since it was a new building, we were unaware of this. All three of these students live in the same community and ride the same school bus together.

Student A was placed in our classroom due to his IEP and receiving Integrated Co-Teaching services in both ELA and Math. In September, his academic levels in ELA were at the beginning of Kindergarten level and his math abilities were at the end of Kindergarten/ beginning of 1st grade level. He was performing at levels well below the rest of his classmates and almost all of his day is differentiated to meet his needs. In addition to academic weaknesses, this student also struggled with severe inattention. He was unable to sit in his seat and attain to any task (even those at his instructional level) for longer than 2-3 minutes. He would often get up and move around the room or lay on the floor at inappropriate times. He was unable to sit on the carpet with his peers and had to sit at his seat during whole group instruction so that he did not distract the students around him.

Student B is a student that displayed tendencies of a student on the autism spectrum, though there was no official diagnosis. He would become very emotional and cry when things did not go his way, he struggled to maintain eye contact during conversation, and did not maintain personal space with adults or peers. He was very drawn to any form of technology (computer, iPad, Smart Board, etc.) and would focus on those activities, rather than his assignments. Very rarely did he complete an entire assignment. His wandering throughout the room and off task behaviors would also disrupt the other students around him.

Student C is a student with Attention Deficit Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and severe anger issues. In the first two months of school, there were numerous incidents that resulted in him receiving several in and out of school suspensions. He was physically aggressive, would purposely find ways to annoy his peers, and would seek out attention in a negative way. He was a constant disruption to instruction. At times, the rest of the students in the room had to be removed while he calmed himself down from an unsafe situation. He would often refuse to work and rarely complete his assignments.

#### What We Tried:

In an attempt to create a safe, nurturing, educationally successful learning environment, we tried to implement small changes in the classroom climate and how we ran our centers. We began with doing whole group GoNoodle Movement breaks prior to centers beginning. This would help students settle right down and be ready for their first center. Then, when student transitioned to the next center, we would do quick Mindful breathing exercises to help them get ready for that center. Next, we began to use Class Dojo as a behavior management tool. The students could earn or lose points depending on their choices. The program offers immediate feedback and parents were able to log on and monitor their student's behavior choices. This program also offered another parent communication avenue.

As the year progressed, we continued to make changes during our GRAIR time. One big change was the addition of the Chromebooks. This allowed us to do different activities with the students and motivate them through the use of technology. The Chromebooks also gave us the opportunity to offer more student choice options. Finally, we have recently changed the organization of our GRAIR time to have fewer, longer centers to reduce transitions.

#### Results:

After trying numerous strategies throughout the year, we were able to identify a few strategies that we found to be successful in helping our three target students during GRAIR time. Student A (S.L.I. and attention issues) was able to decrease his impulsivity and attain to academic tasks when given opportunities to color or movement breaks such as skipping down the hall or a brisk walk. These activities helped to focus him, and he was able to attain for another 10 or so minutes before another break was needed. He is now starting to notice when he is having a hard time staying on task and asks for a movement break. Student B (Autistic) has found

great success communicating with his peers and completing assignments when using his Chromebook. He takes more pride in his work and will do an oral presentation in front of his peers based on a Google Slideshow he created. Student C (ADD/ODD) has been our most challenging to find strategies that work. We have found the most success with forming a positive relationship with him and giving him ample amounts of positive praise when he is making smart choices. He can also earn opportunities to help our SYSOP with her duties, which he enjoys.

Academically, these students not only grew in terms of behavior, but also academically. Below is a chart showing their growth in ELA this school year:

	Student A		Student B		Student C	
	September	May	September	May	September	May
STAR Reading	71	93	292	443	72	213
DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency	3	15	166	181	29	54
Running Records	A	D	N	P	H	J

Finally, we wanted to do a survey to see how the students felt about the classroom during GRAIR time. We knew how we were feeling at the beginning of the school year and wanted to know if the students were feeling the same way. The results of the survey are below:

	November	May
Volume	53% said it was too loud	42% said it was too loud
Classroom Environment	42% said the classroom was too active and they couldn't concentrate	11% said the classroom was too active and they couldn't concentrate
Feelings of Success	37% said they could consistently complete their assignments and understand what they are learning about	47% said they could consistently complete their assignments and understand what they are learning about

#### Reflection - Jaclyn Straub

This project has been very beneficial to my teaching throughout the school year. The first couple of months of the year were very stressful and it was hard to imagine how we were going to make it a successful school year. The behaviors of a small group of students were consuming so much of our time and we did not feel that any high-quality teaching or learning was happening. Since Aimee and I co-teach, our version of ICT became one person teach the lesson, and one-person deal with redirection and behaviors.

One of the most successful strategies that we implemented this year was using Class Dojo as a behavior management tool. I like the immediate feedback it offers the students and they enjoy being able to give themselves points and see them on the class dashboard. The parent communication piece is also very nice because it offers parents a glimpse into their child's day. They can then ask their child about the choices they made throughout the day.

Another successful strategy was implementing movement breaks for Student A when he was unable to attend to his assignments. This quick and easy strategy is something that can be told to his teacher next year and something that can be written into his IEP. We can also provide him with test modifications that allow him movement breaks when taking assessments. I am also very glad to see that this student is starting to notice when he is having difficulty focusing and is now asking to take a short movement break. Teaching our students,

especially our most struggling students, to be self-advocates is one of my biggest goals as a Special Education teacher.

Overall, I feel this project was very successful as we tried numerous strategies that not only benefited our three target students, but also the rest of the students in the classroom. We also formed positive relationships with these students and I hope that they now see us as someone they can trust when they are feeling frustrated or angry.

#### Reflection - Burns

Overall, it was very beneficial to really focus on the students. The three students were new to the building and the staff and support staff were not aware of behavior issues when entering. We now have documented strategies to carry on to future years for teachers to hopefully continue to see academic and social success with them.

Student A came into the classroom in September not looking or acting like a second grader. He now can come into the classroom with less reminders on how he should act. He is beginning to “look” like a student. With modifications in place he is able to complete classwork. Also, with repetition he can complete math assignments independently. He seems happier that he is able to be independent at times and feels successful.

Student B has had less outbursts with techniques that has been implemented. He has learned some coping strategies that seem to be working for him. With the strategies and communication with mom he is not officially labeled from doctor as on the autistic spectrum. The school is beginning testing to allow the student to possibly get counseling for social stories, speech to help with communication with peers, and possible Occupational Therapy to address hand writing/computer use.

Student C I have witnessed the most change from. He has established adult relationships. He will listen to adult most of the time now. At the beginning of the year a district administrator was observing to potentially have him moved to a behavior program. The other students at the beginning of the year did not want to play with this student, and now he is able to play with others. He wants to help students within the foundations room, showing that he has compassion.

It has been a wonderful process of watching the students grow academically and socially. The students hopefully will take the strategies we implemented and use them to continue to grow throughout their academic years.

**Participant's  
Names:**

**Heather Jackson, Sarah Morris, Tami Hebblethwaite, Lori Munnich, Lynne Aumell  
at Hastings-Mallory Elem**

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

Mindful Moment breaks before Listening and learning in the morning and before Math in the afternoon. Students have assigned areas that they go to and the teacher will walk the students through mindful breathing and calming movements.

Teachers will also use GoNoodle's mindful breathing and stretching activities in place of the ones stated above throughout each week for a different voice prompting them and making the students more invested.

Students will write daily in mindful moment journals to express thoughts and feelings as well. Calming music is played while the students are given a five-minute window to write. If students need more time they can ask to continue this activity at the end of each day. The specific students selected for the study will have their journals



collected at the end of each month while all other journals will go home. Students have the choice to not have anyone read their entries, have just the teacher read it, or have just a friend read their entries.

All students across third grade will be involved in this process, but only a select few students will be looked at in greater depth due to the study for class.

All five teachers who are a part of the third-grade team will be using these strategies and techniques daily with the students. We want to keep consistency between all three rooms and all students for the study.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your rationale for the project. Why is this work important?

Hastings Mallory Elementary School has a high percentage of students who receive free or reduced breakfast/lunch. Many of our families are living in poverty, as evidenced by the number of students involved in our “backpack” program, the lack of appropriate winter clothing and footwear, and the genuine concerns that our children share with us. Further, many of our students display behaviors often associated with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; many lack the ability to attend and focus on instruction or on completing an academic task. Impulsive behaviors certainly have a negative effect on the academic performance of some of our students.

According to “Inner Explorer,” readiness to learn is a better predictor of academic achievement than IQ. Many of our students are not ready to learn because they are more concerned about having their basic needs met or they are worried about the members of their dysfunctional family. Mindfulness helps children get ready to learn. Research shows that Mindfulness has several positive effects for students.

- Mindfulness increases attention and focus by teaching students to attend to the present moment.
- Mindfulness improves impulse control.
- Mindfulness reduces stress, which hampers learning by interfering with the connections between the prefrontal cortex (decision making) and the hippocampus (memory center.)
- Mindfulness improves higher brain functioning, by increasing grey matter in the learning parts of the brain.

<http://www.temescalassoc.com/db/hkl/files/2016/12/Mindfulness-Handouts-HKL-VI.pdf>

The positive effects of Mindfulness seem to address many of the weaknesses and/or issues being experienced by our targeted students: lack of readiness for learning, stress/anxiety regarding family situations, inability to focus/attend, and difficulty curbing impulsive behavior. Our plan is to use Mindfulness strategies to improve the academic performance of our students.

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

Rubric for students (classroom teachers provide to students)

Teacher reflection (all 5 teachers)

Domain and module assessments (all teachers)

Journal entries on mindful moments (classroom teachers provide to students)

Student survey/interview: Beginning/Middle/End (classroom teachers provide to students)

Participation in “Mindfulness” activities and data collection: October 2017 - April 2018

Analysis of Data: Ongoing; Final analysis: April 2018

Report completed, presentation to class: May 2018

Presentation to HME staff: June 2018

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Domain and module assessments (all teachers)

Student survey/interview: Beginning/Middle/End

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

Creations of rubric, student journal, and student survey; district provide assessments

**UPDATE:**

It's a new year, a new challenge, a new set of eager, excited, unfocused, unengaged, learned helpless children. As a third-grade team we began the year struggling with the ability to maintain engagement and positive behaviors. Three classrooms of 8-year old's who were ready to test every ounce of patience we ever thought we had. We needed a plan. A big, big plan.

2018 started a little differently for us here at HME. Our district redistricted and closed an elementary building. This meant that we would not only be getting more students but also new teachers. We switched grade levels, met new colleagues, met new students and families of whom we knew nothing about. We were up to the challenge and excited about the year.

A focus of creating a calm, kind, self-driven classroom needed to be created among all three third grade classrooms. We tried and tested several mindful strategies in this effort. From pictures of home to create comfort, soft music to set a mood, and meditation for calming our souls. We still use many of these to date yet settled on using our Chromebook to reflect, communicate, and create a positive, sharing environment.

**Sarah's Section:**

**Steps:**

For me, I was one of the new members to HME. I not only was learning a new curriculum for ELA that had not been used previously at CSI. I was adapting to new staff members and two new teaching partners. I felt the challenges right off the bat but knew that based on the style of teaching and personalities of the other 4 members of my team we would make it a successful year, but our challenge immediately was met, not from each other, but from the students that became a part of room 48, 49, and 50.

I had been told before the beginning of the year that I had a diverse group of students and one that was going to test me on every possible outlet of school and beyond. His teacher from second grade had even come to me over the summer and said "Sarah you WILL be tested. He doesn't appreciate, respect, or follow directions from women. He has ADHD, a 504, and an attitude that will be coming alive daily. Good luck and if you need anything use your resources and get ahold of me."

Knowing this information, I immediately decided to call a meeting with the parents of this child after only a few weeks of school to make sure we were all on the same page. It then came to my attention that not only did this child have a 504 and ADHD, but also suffered from PTSD. This was when I knew this year's class would be perfect for me as I needed to have help and affirmations on how to best meet the needs of a child with severe trauma.

I began the year with a signed contract with the parents, the students, the principal, and myself letting the student know that we were all on the same page. Each of us wanted what was best for him, but that whatever occurred (in all areas of his day) would be discussed with people involved in the contract and added to his "global section" on school tool.

I asked the school psychologist to put up a sensory walk around the building for my student along with others who needed those sensory breaks throughout the day and continued to use sensory cards (similar to that of the walk around the building) and a shaker bottle for my child to have full access too whenever he needed it.

## **Student Learning:**

To make the learning environment not revolve strictly around this one child, I wanted to get all of my students involved in knowing how to take “mindful moments,” understand the sensory cards, and use the pathways of either tortoise or hare whenever they felt it was necessary. It became a community involvement in room 50. I began by having all my students understand what a mindful moment was and how to use it to best meet their specific and individual needs. We discussed what it looks like, sounds like, and how it should make us each feel. I had them pick three favorite spots that they knew well. I explained my three to them and explain how I got to my “special place” and how I felt when I got there. I let them understand that each day after lunch we would take 5-7 minutes and reset ourselves in these specific places, but that at any point, on any given day they had the ability to go to their special places and have a reset. I not only did this but had one of my co-teachers in my classroom describe hers as well, so they could see that each place, feeling, and idea would be unique to each person and that is what made it so special.

Once beginning the class and speaking to my other third grade teammates, I began to understand that this wasn't just going to, or needed in my room, but in all three classrooms. We discussed right off the bat on making this a “joint effort” and taking those mindful moments and placing calming music in the background and having students write about their day using emojis to describe how they were feeling at the midpoint of each day. We called them “midday mindful moment journals” and gave the students the ability to keep their ideas and thoughts to themselves, share only with the teacher and get feedback, or share with a friend. We wanted them to have choice and make them as invested in this new idea as we were.

When the Chromebook came this idea turned into a digital format, allowing the teacher to take back some of the control of what was discussed and allow the students to comment on other people's thoughts and ideas for each day. The music still played in the background, but the focus turned from pencil and paper to google classroom and typing.

As the New York State tests neared and February break had passed I began to teach the students how to use their “special places” when test taking. I had discussed it starting at the beginning of the year but wanted to revisit it as the tests grew nearer. I wanted them to understand that at any time during each day of the test and practice tests that they had the ability to stop “reset” and move forward using their special places and taking a mindful moment. I wanted them to remember that mindful moments didn't have to just be used right after lunch but whenever and wherever necessary to make for a positive day.

## **Teacher Learning:**

Throughout the year, it has been trying and I have definitely had times where I have broken, lost sleep, and felt defeated. With each new situation with my toughest student I was learning more about what really pushed my buttons, how I needed to sometimes reset myself and walk away, and to see what was necessary to make a positive environment for not only one child but the entire room. I need to get myself focused and make sure that not only was I teaching my students to be mindful, but that I was taking the initiative to do it myself. I made a pact with myself to write when I needed to write and reflect upon my year, how I was feeling, and where I felt my strengths were and what I still needed to improve on to be the best teacher for my class I could be.

I not only would write when I needed to, but I became diligent about making sure before bed that I took myself to my “special place” and reflected upon the day and re-centered myself. I love to run and during my runs I would also take the time to reflect upon the day or if I was running before school began I would take the time to reflect upon what I wanted out of the day. What was my mantra going to be? What did I need to accomplish that was necessarily written down in my plan book and what did I have to let go of that had happened yesterday, over the past few days, or the week prior? This took a long time this year to do. It was tough because each day I was being

challenged in new ways that even with 11 years in the classroom I hadn't had occur before. I don't feel I really let myself settle until after February break. It took me a solid six months to really let my shoulders drop and truly reset myself. This was a huge eye opener to me. I have always had anxiety and been high strung, but this year with a child who suffers from so much trauma it escalated those sensations in ways I hadn't seen in a long time which is why it took me so long to work through.

Even as I sit here and write this I know the last 35 days or so will be up and down, but I have taken more time to self-reflect than I ever have before and I have become closer to my class due to this and to my co-teachers based on this new-found situation with teaching. I am thankful for the challenges this year to help myself grown and achieve new pathways that will help me going forward. Students with trauma will come along many times during my career and I now feel I have some good "mindful ways" to implement as I go along in teaching.

## **Tami & Lori**

### **Teacher Learning:**

This was the year of change for the entire third grade team. Tami was a Kindergarten teacher for most of her teaching career. I have been an AIS teacher for all of mine. With the consolidation of buildings and influx of students and teachers our principle thought it was wise to shake things up. Tami, being a kindergarten teacher was moved to third grade. I have always pulled small groups worked more closely with third grade and pushed in for much of the day. We were slightly out of our element yet, up for the challenge. Upon completion of the first week school we knew we had our work cut out for us. Student behavior and personal motivation was horrendous.

We all work very well as a third-grade team Through reflection and sharing out what works well in each class we have had the opportunity to learn and grow from one another. This opportunity with reflection classrooms has allowed Lori and I to address social issues with our class as they arose. We will definitely continue to encourage our students to reflect next year. I felt this 5 to 10 minutes has allowed for true character education that was real and relevant to student needs. I also liked how it made us daily remember the social needs, and the importance of looking at the class and its dynamics on a daily basis. This format of reflections allowed us to co-teach even in different locations and times. The students liked to read one another's comments. This practice also helped our students' families take part, by allowing parents to interact with students during an Open House.

### **Steps:**

This is my first year of teaching third grade after being in Kindergarten for 20 years, and a Special Educator prior to that. I found myself teaching a class of 20 students. 8 of my students started the year on a SBIT plan, 6 of my students are diagnosed ADHD or ADD. Half of my class is eligible for free lunch. This brings a wide variety of factors to the dynamics of this class. We found the most challenging time of my day was after lunch. As a third-grade team we decided to start a mindful, emoji-based journal since many students are familiar with the emojis. We found posters that gave them emoji possibilities for feelings. The students completed this journal with mindful music playing in the background and the room dark. This was done with the intent to allow the students to decompress and transition in a calm, thoughtful way.

The second step was the introduction of our Chromebooks. This led to an opportunity for students to be more actively engaged and they the opportunity to see others' comments and then could respond to the reflection comments. I also provided question stems and we occasionally watched videos that had to do with our subject matter. This allowed us to be more current with issues in the class, immediate feedback was accessed, and students began to actively respond and give feedback to one another. This avenue also allowed Lori the

opportunity to respond at a later time or date, as she was teaching another class during this specific activity. We continued playing mindful music and the lights were off.

### **Student / Teacher Learning:**

This reflection time had some great learning opportunities and it did allow us to grow and all be actively engaged with character education. I was so impressed with student leaders that emerged and the truly reflective comments that began to emerge on a daily basis.

One really eye-opening experience for both Lori and I was when we looked for a child friendly video on learning styles. The video had real children with many different needs that talked about their learning styles. We had the students watch the video and then reflect as to how they feel that they learn best. The video allowed our students to see children very much like themselves discussing their personal learning styles. As the students reflected on their Chromebook the room was silent. The entire class was engaged and focused. The children are allowed to respond to each other as well. Students were agreeing with each other and commenting on learning styles that they also felt they had. They were questioning and probing students who did not respond to the question. This brought a new-found sense of community to our classroom that we had not felt before. Our students have behaviors that affect their learning. This activity allowed them the power and control they need in order to help with regulating themselves. I was so impressed with their suggestions, and we have tried to meet the needs of their learning styles since.

A few days after we had the students reflect on learning styles we experienced a moment that made us want to cheer and cry all at once. We have a weekly runners club with our third graders once a week. A lovely mother and child from another Elementary school joined us. Jay's mom brings him to help him adjust to our building as he will be joining us next year as a part of HME's foundations program. Jay has cognitive disabilities, struggles to walk, is nonverbal and has a smile that will melt your heart. As his mom walks with him in the halls our lovely, rambunctious, challenging third graders run wildly up and down the halls. As we jogged down the hall we noticed that two of our often-unregulated young ladies stopped to talk with Jay and his mom.

(I call these young ladies unregulated resulting in multiple disruptions, arguments and comments to other students throughout the year. One young lady called another student disgusting after she was bitten by a dog and had stitches in her face. This was baffling to say the least. They often blame, argue with and create controversy with their classmates. Both girls struggle with maintaining friendships.)

The sight of this froze us. What were they saying? Were they being kind, appropriate? What if they said something to upset Jay or his mom? So not to create a scene or show we expected failure from them we simply jogged past and encouraged the girls to continue on their way. As usual they didn't listen, and we just prayed for the best. After all the runners were handed over to their parents and placed on the bus to go home Jay and his mom approached us.

Here we go. What did they say?

"I wanted to tell you that two of your students stopped to talk with Jay and myself. They were so kind and friendly. They asked great questions about Jay and shared their own stories with us. They talked with him so kindly and really made him happy. Those girls just made my week."

Two very compulsive, habitually unregulated young ladies used respect, honesty and caring in a way that we have been striving for since September. They made a connection to a student who learned differently from them.

We have observed real growth with this class and maturity as the year progressed. Many students have really blossomed and become more engaged, less learned helpless behaviors, and improved cooperative group skills.

### **Reflection on Learning:**

We both felt that this class has made great gains in all academic and social areas. We are a work in progress and with so many needs it is a challenge. The quiet reflection and student driven comments has helped this class gel socially. This opportunity lets them not only be leaders but also listeners. Reflecting gives them a safe place to speak their minds and give opinions. It also allows us as teachers the opportunity to process the students' words before reacting. We can think about how we want to respond instead of instantly praising or disciplining them. They have learned to be more responsible and improved with working kindly and collaboratively. A real strength for this class is their creativity and the use of technology. They really shine when given a project and they have shown growth working out problems and peer teaching. Learning about trauma-sensitive classrooms gave us a strong foundation this year. The reading in our text and this reflection time has been a positive learning point after starting in a new grade level for both the teachers and the students. Focusing on personal reflections, positive communication and growth mindsets have helped the children find their paths more successfully in this transitional year before their intermediate grades. Our 'trauma' students have an outlet that they are in control of. They are becoming leaders, friends, listeners and learners. This activity is a time that their trauma does not define them.

### **Heather and Lynne**

#### **"Forever changed, not forever damaged"**

This phrase from the book, Fostering Resilient Learners, really resonated with us. A few of the students in our Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom have experienced "trauma" or we have concluded that they have experienced trauma based on their words, actions, and behaviors.

#### **Specific Examples:**

**CM:** This student is physically abused by older siblings and neglected by his parents. Although poverty is not considered a trauma, this child does not have enough food to eat nor clean clothes that fit properly.

**BB:** This student began the year very angry. He would not accept assistance and he would often refuse to work or respond to directives.

This student was reading at a Level C and his math skills were very weak. When this student did converse with us, it was typically to tell us about his older brother hitting him and teasing him.

**CR:** This student is almost constantly in the "freeze" state. When asked a question, if we know he knows the answer, this student will just freeze. The BASC revealed that this child has no self-esteem or self-confidence because his older brother consistently emotionally abuses this child.

**DG:** This student tried running out of school the first day and would refuse to come into school. He was getting his breakfast hand delivered because he didn't want to wait in line during breakfast. He would throw a tantrum if he was not first in line and refuse to leave the room.

As the author, Kristen Souers, discusses in her book, it is difficult to have knowledge of a child's abuse, neglect, or traumatic history and not allow empathy to bring us to the conclusion that the child cannot possibly "overcome the odds" and be a successful student. It is also difficult to believe that we can change the course of a person's

life in the few hours we have with them each week when compared to the amount of time they spend at home. As teachers, we decided to embrace the thoughts of Souers and show our students “what they are capable of, expose them to different ways of being, to teach them healthy ways of managing, to empower them to learn and grow in productive ways, and to love them both for who they are and for who they may become,” (Souers, pg. 140-141).

We decided that we would not allow pity to influence us, and that we focus on having **high-expectations** for every single one of our students. Further, we would not allow our students to have low-expectations for themselves regardless of their history, trauma-filled or not.

We worked to make connections with all of our students and to build “strong” relationships, particularly with our students, who lacked confidence in their own abilities. We talked with our students, talked with previous teachers, special area teachers, their parents, observed behaviors, listened to their interactions with others, and we were identified a strength for each and every student.

We differentiated instruction so that every student could experience success, but we never LOWERED our EXPECTATIONS! The number of papers and assignments that we handed back to students and informed them that we knew that they could do better seemed endless. The number of times we refused to allow a student to sit silently waiting for us to let them off the hook also seemed quite frequent. Additionally, we did not allow tantrums and poor choices of behavior, to “excuse” a student from doing an assignment. Using reflection journals and teaching strategies for dealing with frustration rather than demonstrating inappropriate behaviors, our students began to focus more on learning and what they had to do to be successful. All students have made progress with their self-reflection. Even students who we did not deem as students at risk were able to think about their work and make changes. Some of our above level students would say “I need to slow down and not rush through my work” or “I need to write neater.” Letting our students respond to each other has made students show compassion to one another.

As we look back over the progress that our students have made this year, we feel like we have really made a difference.

### **Specific Examples:**

**CM:** CM no longer crawls under tables because he is frustrated and believes that he cannot do the assignment we have given him. He, also, has far fewer outbursts than he did at the beginning of the year. It was amazing to watch him present the information that he found while researching China’s culture with his peer group! CM is even bragging about his math abilities.

**BB:** This student rarely displays anger anymore. With a lot of encouragement and an expectation that this student would succeed, he has made great progress. This student was recommended for Math Resource and ICT Math this school year and initially, he needed this level of support. Once we were able to make connections with this student and convince him that he could succeed, his growth has been significant. In fact, next year, BB does not qualify for any math support! He considers himself a “math whiz.” He has also increased by several reading levels.

**CR:** Our friend, who “freezes,” is freezing less often. In small group situations, he is actually volunteering to answer questions, he is responding with correct answers, and smiling afterward. He is even approaching us and talking to us spontaneously.

**DG:** This student is one of our students who is self-reflecting and trying to work on areas that he needs to. He does not need his breakfast hand delivered, he waits like everyone else. His need to be first is not as much of an issue. His attitude has improved greatly, and he knows that he cannot get away things he tried in the beginning of the year.

Daily self-reflection will be implemented in years to come as a way to connect students with their own learning and responsibilities. It has helped establish a real learning community.

**ACTION:** Describe specifically how the Creating Collaborative Spaces for Learning themes are incorporated into your project to cultivate and support student learning.

My goal is to create a classroom where students feel welcomed and are provided with a support system which will allow for them to learn to cope with the trauma in their lives and eventually turn their perspectives on life around.

**RATIONALE:** Fully state your **rationale** for the project. Why is this work important?

Reflecting over my school years – perhaps I was naïve – but it seemed like we lived in simpler times. Most of us had one mom and dad, we lived comfortably within our means and lived our lives care-free without fear, but times and our society have changed drastically. I work with students with special needs, middle school students with non-stop drama...most from broken homes and many dealings with issues I never dealt with until my adult years of life. Out of all my students, however; one singular student stands out as a child with complex trauma in her life. This student, who I will refer to as “\*”, has learning disabilities, anger-management issues, gender identity problems and is presently being bounced between three ‘homes’. In her young years, she has already dealt with: Verbal Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Child Abandonment, Exposure to Drug Abuse and Alcoholism, and at the age of 13 already contemplated suicide multiple times. She is what our text referenced as “one in sixteen students having an ACE score of 4 or higher.” As I read the first chapter in our book, Fostering Resilient Learners, by Souers & Hall, I found my thoughts continuously going back to her and thinking if there was only one child in the world I could reach out to and help – to somehow change the direction her life presently was going in, she was the one! So, this became my focus, my mission was to make a difference in this child’s life! (and in the process, if it could help others and make me a better teacher – so be it!)

Now I had set a goal, but where would I start? How can I make a positive difference in the 45minutes (or less) a day with all of these negative things going on outside of the class? How can I teach her to cope and become resilient?

**RESPONSIBILITIES/TIMELINE:** Identify a series of **action steps** you will take to complete your project. Next to each step, identify person(s) **responsible** for carrying out that task. For each step also identify your **timeline** (during what month(s) you plan to complete each step).

- September: Observe and document present levels of attendance, grades and behaviors
- October: Create a welcoming and safe environment
- November: Involve Students in Creating Ways of Helping Others.
- December- Create STEM Projects which encourages Team Work and Self-Importance.

**EVALUATION:** What **data** will you collect that shows the impact of your project on teacher and student learning? How will you document student learning? Teacher learning?

Data will be collected in a variety of ways. The student’s attendance, grades and class participation will be documented. In addition, an on-going journal will be kept keeping track of daily events, observations made in school, attempts for intervention and her responses to these interventions.

**RESOURCES:** What resources will you need for this project? What costs, if any, will be incurred? What are possible sources of funding for needed resources?

There will be no additional costs for this project, other than the time, patience, love and money that all good teachers invest in their classroom.

**UPDATE:** Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan.

Early in the process, I decided I was going to do something spectacular, something to motivate others, something really BIG.... I wanted to inspire \* to change her behaviors and help her obtain a goal she would not be able to reach on her own. There was an 8<sup>th</sup> grade trip to NYC in the spring which I knew her family could not afford. The year was young, \* was doing well academically in school and her behaviors seemed intact, so I proposed a challenge for her. If she could continue to be successful in school and stay out of trouble, I would pay her expenses for the trip! We discussed the terms of the agreement and shook hands. All was well for 5 weeks... and then a situation occurred at home and her life began to spiral. It was like day time turned to night instantly. I’ve worked with \* for 3 years now, I can almost predict to the second when she is going to come to a breaking point. She tries



to keep it together, but something will happen (sometimes just the simplest thing) that causes her to snap – and then it is all over. She can't see a way out of the situation and she loses all control. On this day, she walked out of school after using a few choice words with an administrator and was suspended for 5 days – an automatic withdrawal from the trip!

At first, I felt defeated...I felt like my project was over. But then, I realized, this wasn't about me. It didn't matter, how badly I wanted this for her, or even how badly she wanted to please me. She didn't act out to hurt me. She had absolutely no control over the crazy events in her life. The promise of a trip meant nothing to her. She had had far greater losses and broken promises in her life. She had been put down by others her entire life to the point that she didn't even think she was worthy of such a thing. So, losing the trip, meant nothing to her. It was so frustrating to me and as much as I felt like throwing in the towel and walking away, I decided that I wasn't quite ready to give up. I wasn't ready to give up on her... or myself. There were other students who, I could see were benefiting from the steps I had taken so far. I just needed to rethink my direction and take smaller steps.

I could identify signs when \* was going to come to a breaking point, but I needed to help her to recognize those signs and how to cope with it in an appropriate way. She needed to find self-worth within herself. We needed to set up goals that were within reach – that she saw as being obtainable. What could make her feel that she was important and that she could make a positive difference in others' lives?

I am actively involved in the Character Education Committee in our school. We are constantly discussing positive traits students can have and how we can contribute to the community. Any time that Char. Ed. was involved in some type of school activity or fundraiser, I would ask \* for her input. For example, I'd ask her if she thought we could raise more money for a Florida Hurricane Relief fundraiser by having a computer day at lunch or a hat day. I always went with her choice.... and when we raised over \$500, I told her it was because of her contributions. "Yeah!" she said with a smile, "I told you we could make more money doing it that way!" Each time there was an activity... I gave her a say in planning it and allowed her to think that she was the cause for its success.

Then one day, quite by accident, I witnessed something that was another turning point of the project. I was able to find something that \* could connect to. She would often put a wall up and say she didn't care about anything. She had a tough exterior, but inside she really has a good heart. On this particular day, I could hear \* yelling and pushing a student in the hallway. I quickly broke up the confrontation and asked \* to come for a walk with me. I made it clear, that she was not in trouble, I just needed to understand what had happened. She explained that someone was making fun of one of the life skills kids and she was defending the student. Through our conversation, I could see her light up when we spoke about a specific student in the life skills program. Shortly after, I approached \* and asked her if she thought it might be fun to come up with some type of special reward system for the class. Together, we came up with a plan where my math students could earn points. When a certain number of points were obtained by each student (usually in the course of a month), then we won the privilege of taking a day off from math and having a game day with the students in the life skill room. Everybody loved working towards this. Even the worst of students, were perfectly behaved when we went to the other class. You could see how much fun the kids were all having and the joy in their hearts for doing something nice for someone else. A couple of months later, when \* was starting to have problems again in school, an intervention plan was put in place where she had to earn points throughout the day to earn time in the life skills room at the end of the day. Although minimal, she finally has some control in her life and was able to see that she could make a difference.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON TEACHER LEARNING:** We examined our reflections and found the following: (Support each claim with examples/evidence).

As previously mentioned, I became easily frustrated at the beginning of the year. There were days that I found myself sometimes 'turning to the dark side'. A child often has a way of letting you know exactly how they feel. If they are feeling flustered about something, they're going to do everything in their power to convey that and make you feel flustered, as well! I had to learn to not let them take over the class, not to get sucked in...sometimes, that is easier said than done, but I persevered! I've learned that I need to be more patient and not to give up on things so quickly. It's important to go with your gut feelings, to stand true to your beliefs and to do so with a style of teaching which is true to your heart. My initial goal was to make a huge impact on one student which, in the end, didn't really happen...but what did result was probably far more profound. My efforts affected far more than just one student. As I proceeded with each step in this process, I found that many more students were at risk students. I knew that there were one or two at-risk students in each class, but as the year progressed, I found that over 90% of my students were in some way affected by stress and trauma. In \*'s class alone, all of the students came from broken homes, each had lost a parent due to some form of substance abuse, and only two students were living with one

of their biological parents. In other classes, there were students that were living in shacks, going from one home to another, had no hot water, and others that were playing the role of the adult in their homes...the list continues. In one instance, I had asked a child what they did over the weekend. He replied by telling me that he went from hotel to hotel trying to find his mother – they had been looking for over two weeks. The entire experience this year has been extremely eye-opening to me. It made me more aware of what my students are dealing with on a daily basis.

The process made me change as a person and as an educator. So often teachers become overwhelmed with curriculum, state standards, test results, APPR, etc. - that we forget why we're really there to begin with. Simply stated, we teach because we love kids and we want them to learn to be successful in life.

**ANALYSIS OF DATA ON STUDENT LEARNING:** We examined \_\_\_\_\_ and found the following: (Give examples/evidence for each claim).

\* is still failing most of her classes, but to a smaller degree. Usually by this time of the year, she is completely done. She stops coming to school or is suspended for the remaining days of the school year. Last year by this date her average in my class was a 35, this year she has an average of 89. She thrives on positive reinforcement. You can physically see her face light up when I remind her how much better she is doing. The same 'sparkle' is in her eyes, anytime she is with the Life Skills students. She just reminded me the other day that our math class needs to start earning points again, so we can have one more 'game day' with the Life Skills students. It was not all a 'bed of roses'... there are still days that are simply too overwhelming for \* to cope, and several patches of 5-day suspensions, but they are fewer and farther apart than they had been in the previous years. In the past, she had more individual days of absences of her choice, where she just didn't feel like coming to school. Now, she wants to be in school. When she gets in trouble, it is because she can't cope with the events in her life any longer and she will just spiral from one bad decision to the next. One thing that we did notice, is that when she was given a 5-day suspension, she would always ask permission to come see me prior to leaving the building, and when she returned, she would ask to come see me again before going back to her daily routine. So perhaps we have created a safe environment for her.

Was I able to help \* and the other students cope with their lives? Not as much as I had hoped. In some instances, I made a positive impact – but there still were a few students that I wasn't able to help. I could sit down with them a day or two after an emotional outburst and we would discuss different ways of coping with their frustrations, but when they had their next bad day, it was often impossible to get them back on track. They were too overwhelmed at the moment to rationalize their emotions. Still, I haven't given up on them.... it's just going to take a little bit longer.

I wanted to create an environment, where my students felt welcomed and safe, which I think I was successful at. Even when co-workers entered the classroom, they would comment how pleasant and inviting it was. The room was organized, cheery, bright, and covered with positive messages. Relaxing nature sounds were always playing in the back ground. Even I found the room to be a bit of a sanctuary, where I could go to calm myself on stressful days. The students looked forward to coming in on cold snowy mornings to a crackling fire on the smart board. As the year progressed, I found that more of the students felt comfortable coming in to visit sporadically throughout the day, they seemed eager to come to class to share the events of their day or how they were feeling about life in general. More students asked if they could come to visit over lunch, and I found that I got to know them better.

I wanted to involve students in creating ways of helping others. Again, I feel that I accomplished this goal. For \*, it was helping out students in the Life Skills class. In the middle school, we have T-shirts that say #TheMiddleMatters that we wear in the middle of the week. For 6 months, we have a word of the month: **M**anner, **I**ntegrity, **D**ignity, **D**etermination, **L**eadership, and **E**mpathy. I have incorporated, these words into my lessons throughout the year. In December, I created STEM Math activities which encouraged them to use these qualities in order to accomplish their task. I had a group of students (actually, the class that \* was in) with a new student and they absolutely hated each other, but for that entire 6-week patch, they worked as a team. My 6<sup>th</sup> grade group created their own 'act of kindness' advent calendar which we shared with the other classes. Was that a Math lesson??? Maybe not... unless counting down from 25 counts!? But what they were learning from the lesson was far more important. There were multiple ways students found self-worth. For some it was as simple as bringing in positive messages to post each day, helping to prepare upcoming lessons for students in the younger grade, helping decorate the room, or creating friendly rebus messages on the windows for other classes across the way to enjoy. For others, it was encouraging them to help in fundraisers. If the school was having a can drive, I challenged them to bring more in. Instead of putting their cans in a box in the front of the school, we made a Christmas tree in the math room by stacking cans. This way they could visually see how the smallest acts of kindness (one or two cans) could eventually 'add up' (no math pun intended ☺) to become something much bigger. It touched my heart, one day when a student's father came in with a box filled with over 30 cans of goods. This family's name had actually been given as a family in need

and was going to be receiving a basket over the holidays. One day, a student walked up to me with a dollar in her hand, when she handed it to me, I asked what it was for, thinking perhaps she wanted me to hold on to it for her or something. Her response touched my heart. She told me she just wanted to do something to help someone else, she wanted to make a difference and she knew that I would know who would need it. Time and time again, I was pleasantly surprised by student's generosity and pleased by their genuine pride of doing something good!