Developing a Youth Mindfulness Program in a School-Based Setting: A Two-Year Status Report

John P. Rettger PhD\textsuperscript{2}, Michael A. Fu BS\textsuperscript{3}, Julia M. Chandler MS\textsuperscript{1}, Victor Carrión MD\textsuperscript{2} & Ravenswood City School District
\textsuperscript{1}Stanford University School of Medicine; \textsuperscript{2}Early Life Stress and Pediatric Anxiety Program, Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Stanford University

Abstract

**Objectives:** We report results from two studies of a new mindfulness program in a low-income public school district.

**Methods:** Our program includes eight weekly 30-minute sessions in which students learn mindfulness and socioemotional skills. Study 1 included nine 4th and 5th grade classes (n=212) and was evaluated using the Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2) and the Childhood and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM). Study 2 included one 7th grade class (n=30) and was evaluated using the Perceived Stress Scale for Children (PSS-C) and practice frequency. Student qualitative reports were collected weekly and teacher quality assurance surveys at study end.

**Results:** Wilcoxon signed-rank tests compared pre- and post-scores on the BASC-2, CAMM, and PSS-C. Statistically significant findings include improvement for elevated scores at BASC-2 baseline, with changes in internalizing problems being the most consistent (z=-1.97, p=0.05; z=-2.15, p=0.03; z=-2.40, p=0.02; z=-2.10, p=0.04), for students at risk for school problems, internalizing problems, emotional symptoms, and personal adjustment, respectively; those with baseline elevation in personal adjustment scores benefitted the most. Study 2 participants reported 1.73 weekly home practices and practice self-efficacy of 42.5 percent. Teacher report suggests improvement in program content, partnership, and sustainability.

**Conclusions:** Results suggest mindfulness may promote behavioral and psychological improvement. Teacher and student surveys suggest strengthening self-directed practice and teacher partnerships may contribute to positive outcomes.

Project Objectives

The purpose of our research is to evaluate the behavioral and psychological outcomes of a new school-based mindfulness program in a low-income, public school district. Two studies were conducted over a two-year period examining the effectiveness of our program and its ongoing development.

Background

Researchers from the Stanford University Early Life Stress and Pediatric Anxiety Program (ELSPAP) partnered with the Ravenswood City School District (RCSD) in East Palo Alto (EPA), a city in the San Francisco Bay Area, to implement two mindfulness programs in public school classrooms. The EPA community is coping with high levels of chronic stress and trauma tied to socioeconomic challenges and community violence. The mental health needs of the RCSD exceed current service availability.

The goals of our program are to:
1. Increase students’ self-awareness and self-regulation.
2. Connect the concepts of stress, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.
3. Apply mindfulness-based practices to cope with stress.
4. Enact pro-social behaviors such as empathy and compassion.
5. Teach practical coping tools, such as deep breathing.

Despite the growing use of mindfulness in school settings, the current literature is limited by design issues such as small sample sizes and lack of quantitative data concerning the developmental appropriateness of school-based mindfulness practices for children.

Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sampling Method</strong></td>
<td>Convenience, District-directed</td>
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<td><strong>Study Design</strong></td>
<td>Correlational</td>
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<td><strong>Curriculum Design</strong></td>
<td>8 weekly, 30-minute mindfulness/yoga sessions</td>
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<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>N = 213 P &amp; 4th graders; 9 classrooms across 3 schools 108 males, 105 females</td>
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<td><strong>Measures</strong></td>
<td>BASC-2: pre &amp; post</td>
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<td>Student journals: weekly</td>
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<td>Teacher feedback form: post</td>
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<td>Student &amp; teacher feedback forms: post</td>
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**Activities**

- Breathing Practice
- Feelings Practice Art Activity
- Funny Mind Exercise
- Group & Individual Reflection
- Loving-Kindness Practice
- Mindful Eating
- Walking Meditation
- Yoga

**References**


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Contact Information:
John P. Rettger, PhD
rettger@stanford.edu

Select Quotes

**Students (Year 1):**
- “Mindfulness helps you feel better and calmer by relaxing and letting all your stress out.”
- “It’s got me breathe in and out to calm me down.”

**Partner Teacher (Year 2):**
- “I see a change within myself due to participating in mindfulness. I have been aware of my breathing and have been taking breaths to calm my when frustrated during class. I hope to exhibit this and share with my students to encourage them to use the strategies.”

Conclusions

- Mindfulness and yoga instruction in elementary schools is feasible, acceptable, and may contribute to behavioral and psychological improvements.
- Non-significant findings on the CAMM and PSS-C may suggest a need to increase the “dose” of mindfulness delivered.
- Year 2 results suggest the curriculum updates successfully strengthened program content, teacher partnership, and likelihood of program sustainability.
- Qualitative findings suggest students’ engaged understanding of mindfulness and their ability to detect its positive effect on their emotional well-being.
- Future studies may increase instruction on self-directed practice, utilize objective measures to support self-report data, and include a control group and a follow-up assessment.

Contact Information:
John P. Rettger, PhD
rettger@stanford.edu