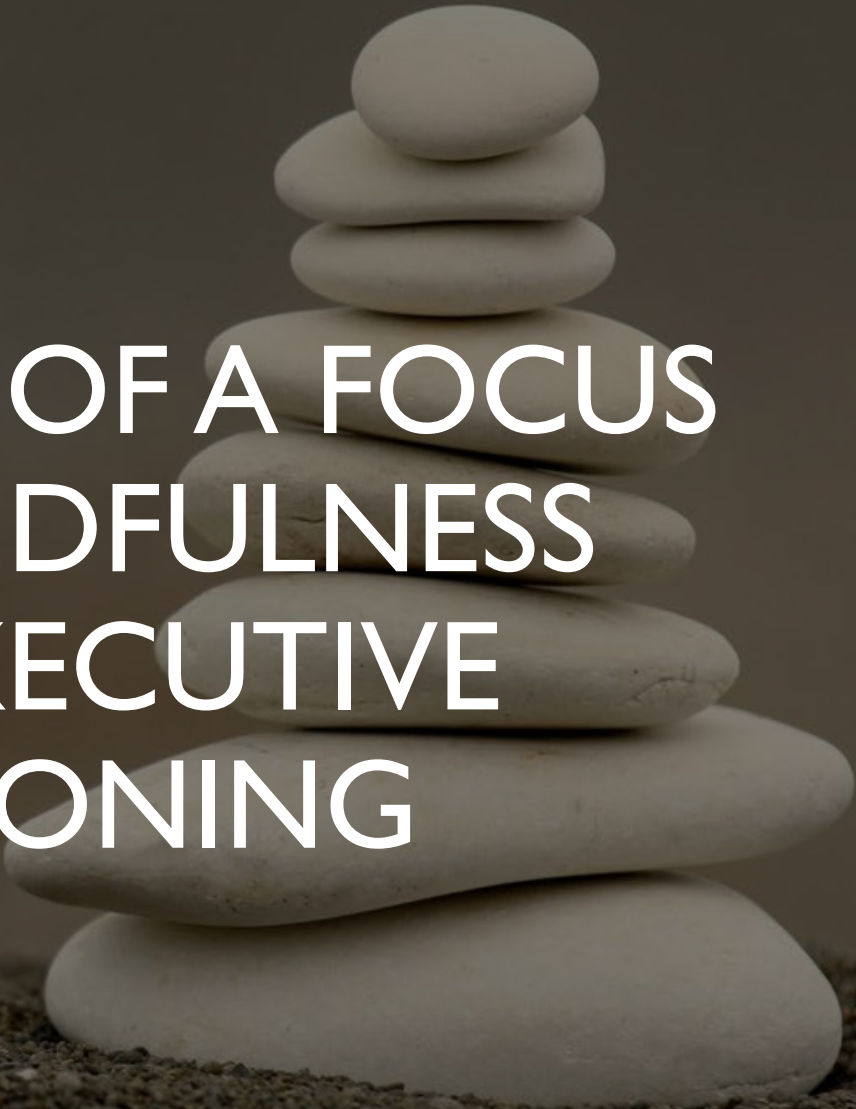


DR. JOLENE JOHNSON



IMPACT OF A FOCUS  
ON MINDFULNESS  
AND EXECUTIVE  
FUNCTIONING

# TEACHER STRESS AND BURNOUT

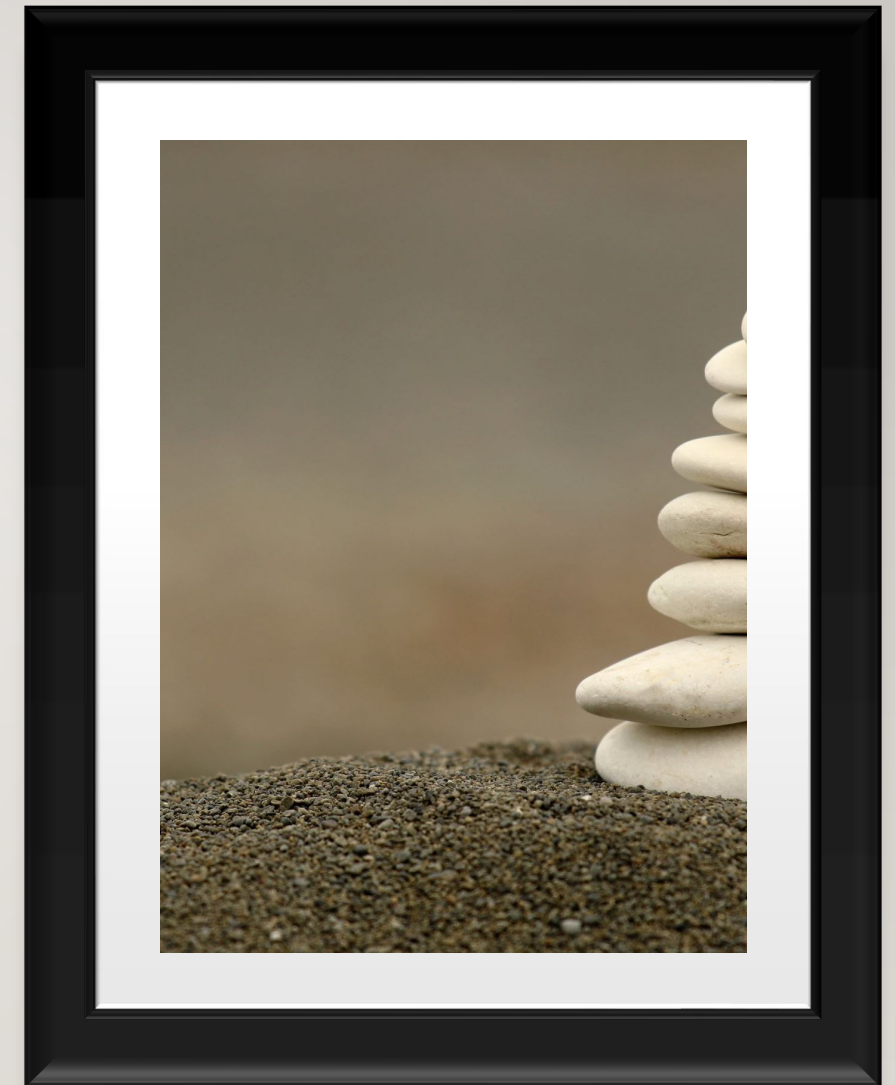
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Burnout and turnover among early childhood teachers continues to impact the field of education.

Studies report childcare professionals possess several risk factors for cardiovascular disease and often report experiencing high rates of stress which can lead to depression and/or burnout.

Addressing the wellbeing of ECPs is important as those who experience significant stress are less likely to engage with children in sensitive and responsive ways (Hamre & Pianta 2004)

Research on teacher burnout indicates that it impacts not only teacher outcomes but multiple student outcomes (Shen, et al., 2015).



# MINDFULNESS & EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

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- Improved Executive Functioning
- Improved Attention
- Improved Memory
- Improved Focus
- Decreased Anxiety/Stress
- Decreased Depression

Mindfulness practices have been identified as positive and beneficial within an early childcare classroom environment as these practices have been linked to improving children's skills surrounding focus and attention, self-regulation, and social-emotional competency. (Adair & Bhaskaran, 2010; Garner, et al., 2018; Willis & Dinehart, 2014).



# INTERVENTION BACKGROUND

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- 13 high quality early childhood sites serving low-income households
- Grant focused on social emotional skills, executive function, mindfulness practices and self-care
- Buy-In and engagement from sites was high
- Leadership was engaged
- Focus for year prior to pandemic was on staff and student mindfulness practices & increased implementation fidelity with chosen SEL curricula



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## DESIGN

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Focused on the students (Infant to PreK)

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Teachers learned mindfulness practices and Brain Games to implement in their classrooms

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Embedded within a social emotional framework



# METHODS

- Maslach Burnout Inventory – Educator’s Survey (MBI-ES)
  - 3 subscales: Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization & Personal Accomplishment
  - Spring 2019 and Spring 2020
  - Lead teachers, assistant teachers and aides
- Focus Groups
  - Spring 2020 and Spring 2021



**RESULTS**



*Table 1*  
*Overall MBI Subscale Means and Categories*

	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Low Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>Moderate Emotional Exhaustion</b>	<b>High Emotional Exhaustion</b>
<b>2019</b>	212	29.28 (12.16)	16%	31%	53%
<b>2020</b>	212	28.35 (11.53)	17%	32%	51%
	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Low Depersonalization</b>	<b>Moderate Depersonalization</b>	<b>High Depersonalization</b>
<b>2019</b>	212	8.05 (3.91)	67%	23%	10%
<b>2020</b>	212	7.79 (3.71)	71%	19%	10%
	<b>n</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Low Personal Accomplishment</b>	<b>Moderate Personal Accomplishment</b>	<b>High Personal Accomplishment</b>
<b>2019</b>	212	47.61 (6.86)	2%	5%	93%
<b>2020</b>	212	48.54 (6.40)	2%	3%	95%

Note: Emotional Exhaustion Scores: 0-16=Low, 17-26= Moderate, ≥ 27=high; Depersonalization Scores: 0-8=Low, 9-13=Moderate, ≥ 14=high; Personal Accomplishment Scores: 0-30=Low, 31-36=Moderate, ≥ 37 =High





Maslach-Burnout Inventory-Educator's Survey

$\beta$  (SE)

	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalization	Personal Accomplishment
Intercept	3.71 (0.23)***	1.55 (0.12)***	6.11 (0.12)***
Time	-0.08 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)
Teaching Position	-0.25 (0.06)***	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Organization Tenure	-0.04 (0.02)*	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Teacher Depression	0.53 (0.13)***	0.18 (0.08)*	-0.11 (0.07)
Variance			
Site (Intercept)	0.24	0.02	0.04
Residual	1.50	0.57	0.54

Note: \*= $p < .05$ , \*\*= $p < .01$ , \*\*\*= $p < .001$



## FOCUS GROUP THEMES

- Critical importance of **having learned and practiced mindfulness and self-regulation strategies prior to COVID19**
- Pandemic allowed teacher to focus on **meaningful and intentional parent engagement**
- **Support and recognition of the need for self-care by staff**
- **Focus on social emotional learning and mindfulness helped everyone at the sites**



# TEACHER FEEDBACK ON WHAT WORKS

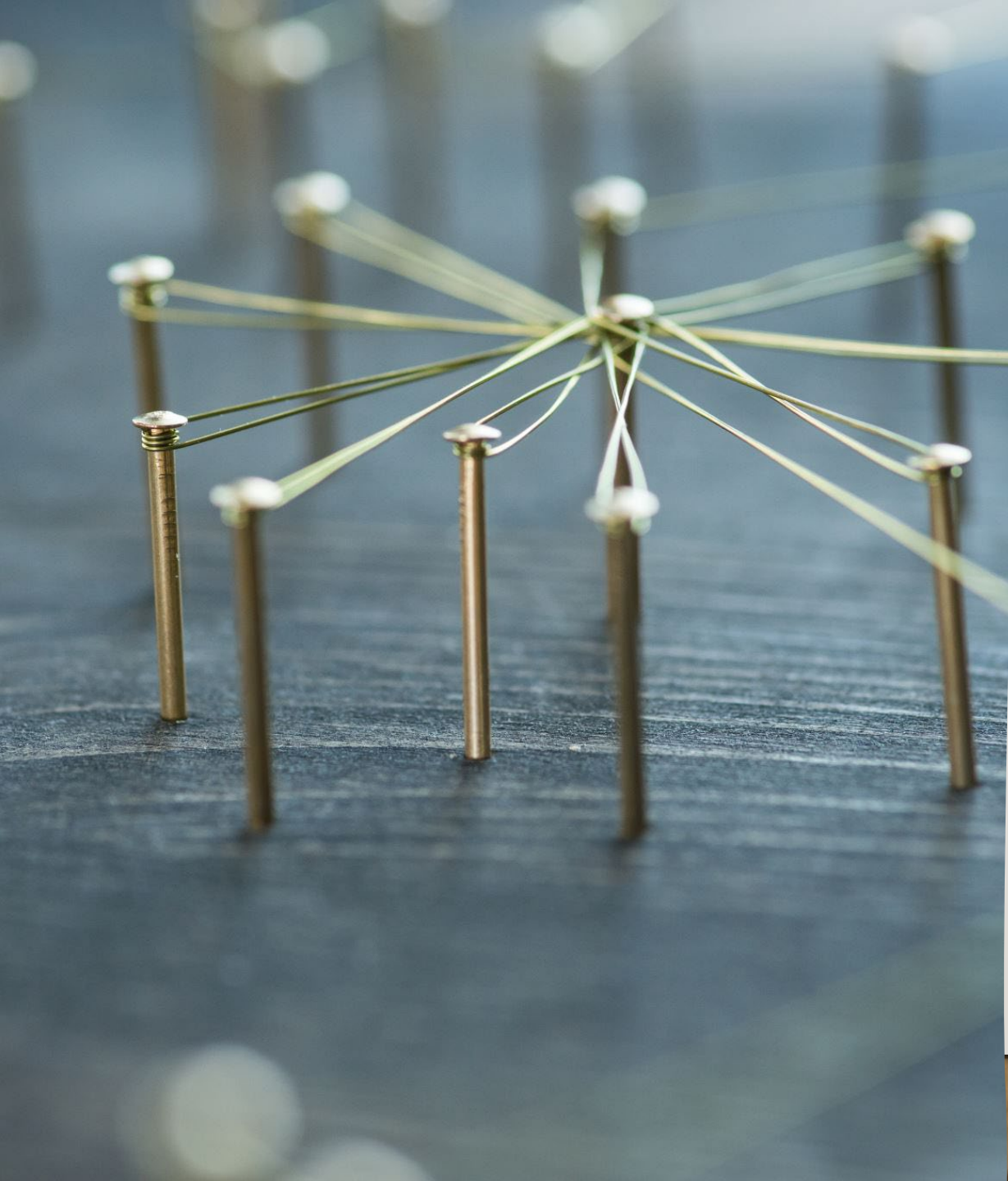
- **“Without the M&M grant, I don’t think our center would be running this well during COVID. The strategies that we have implemented the last year, and the relationships that we have built, have made our center so much stronger and the shutdown has proven that.”**
- **“Teachers have found comfort during the pandemic in one-on-one conversations with parents. That is an important SEL connection too. Teachers and parents share the experience of being there for a child.”**



## IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

- **“I am still so thankful that they are still able to call and check in on all this craziness during this COVID time. It so so good to talk to them, helpful!”**
- **“I know it’s not just my task to make sure the kids are learning, it’s also my task to be fully present with my students and it provides a foundation for them. It gives me permission to stop and check in with myself in a way I wouldn’t, if we did not have the culture.”**





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# LESSONS LEARNED



# WHY?

- Providing materials and training on concrete mindfulness and stress reduction strategies pre COVID 19
- Focus on mindfulness and social emotional learning
- School Directors understanding and supporting self-care
- SEL curricula and framework encouraging parent engagement
- Reflective Consultation from an external person
- Continuing the work



# STRONG CONNECTIONS

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Teachers are always using brain games. I'm using the mindfulness cards a lot, as a resource for classrooms to use for kids to slow down, especially during naptime. I find myself pulling those resources a lot. It's a reminder that we have these. **I have to remind myself to practice mindfulness because sometimes I'm feeling anxious about situations. When I feel anxious, I try to take care of myself.** When I'm in this situation, reinforcement to take a deep breath. **I feel more effective and supportive to families when I'm taking care of myself, so I can help the families better.**



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## BENEFITS SEEN BY TEACHERS

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Worked for all ages of students  
(Infant-preK)

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Sites embraced it – able to adapt  
and use it

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Seeing growth in students EF and  
SEL skills

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Parent engagement has increased





# TEACHER FEEDBACK

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- The M&M program has been a LIFE CHANGER! I am not as stressed as I was before. I am mindful about my emotions and have tools in my toolbox not only for the students but for myself.
- That is huge! I have podcasts that I can listen to that Becky Bailey has put out, calm apps, resources to groups of people that meet up weekly to do mindfulness practices, **and I have had the opportunity to be on a team that we are learning on how to implement this in the classroom, for each other, and for parents.**



# HOW IT'S CHANGED TEACHER MINDSETS

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- M&M has really supported our teachers during the pandemic to being more mindful of when they reach a point they need to take a break. **I have seen more teachers tap out and tell someone to take over when they need support. Asking for support is becoming more of a norm.**
- Being **more intentional of taking two days off each month to reset.** Without the pandemic, I would've worked and not take time that I need and now it has become a practice for me to be okay with taking time away.
- **I would have burned out and quit this past year without the resilience project.** A lifesaver for sure and I use the tools still.



# PARENT ENGAGEMENT

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- 15 signed up, and 9 or 10 are showing up every week and that is the largest group we have had.
- Parent engagement was really hard to do virtually—some of the teachers that were focusing more on executive function tried to take lots of pictures, as they did brain games, and when they shared those pictures, it wasn't just, “this is what your child did today.” It was more, “This is what your child is doing, and this is why..”
- One specific teacher's next step was not just activities, but also materials and videos, like this is how it looks in the classroom and what comes next if you do it at home.



# CONNECTING TO BRAIN AND DEVELOPMENT

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- I'm amazed how the brain works. We really need to have reminders about that more often. New research, it would be good to get updates on brain studies and things like that.



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## HELPFUL HINTS

Embed	Embed into current practices
Concrete	Concrete materials and rationale
Be	Be Intentional
Site	Site wide support and implementation
Engage	Engage parents in the learning and practices

