

EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS IN K-6 SPECIAL  
EDUCATION TRANSITION SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY

By

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

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APPROVED BY:

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study will be to understand the perspectives of implementing mindfulness-based interventions for special education teachers in elementary special education transition settings. The theory guiding this study involves experiential learning, which requires students and educators to acquire skills to promote self-regulation actively. A qualitative case study approach provides insight into the advantages and challenges of implementing mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) to understand elementary special education teachers' perceptions. Ten educators from rural Pennsylvania school districts comprise the sample pool. Collection methods include interviews, lesson plan analysis, and surveys. Triangulation of data reveals how educators in special education transition settings utilize mindfulness, both benefits and challenges in delivering student services.

*Keywords:* mindfulness, coping skills, special education, experiential learning, growth mindset

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to God, my creator, for the gifts and talents to assist the students and families that I will serve.

I dedicate this to my wife, Sarah, who supported my decision to pursue my doctorate and provided motivation to finish the race during challenging times.

To my parents, who encouraged and provided opportunities for me as a youth to grow into the man I am today.

To the administration, staff, and community of Claysburg-Kimmel School District, who provided inspiration and support while I completed my doctoral journey.

To family and friends who always believed in my abilities to earn a doctorate.

To my children, Lucy and Levi, may you continue to amaze me daily with your learning and loving abilities.

## Acknowledgments

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Lastly, I would like to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the inspiration behind pursuing my doctorate from Liberty University. I wanted to gain knowledge in ways to best support students struggling in schools. Through Jesus Christ, the topic of mindfulness was on full display while supporting peers, students, and families during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Witnessing first-hand the challenges families faced, I felt encouraged to identify techniques to ease the mental and emotional strain families were feeling throughout quarantine. Through coursework provided at Liberty University and personal reflections of weekly Gospel Readings, my faith has strengthened. My willingness to allow Jesus Christ to provide guidance throughout this process has helped me overcome personal challenges during this dissertation process. I acknowledge that without the love and support of Jesus Christ, none of my progress could have been achieved.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

Emotional Disturbance (ED)

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Internal Review Board (IRB)

Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBI)

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

Teachers in special education classrooms must possess tools to accommodate the needs of students in their classes. On any given day, students in special education transition settings could demonstrate multiple behaviors, such as tantrums, hyperactivity, non-compliance, and inattention, which require modifications to the standard curriculum (Aguilar-Raab et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2021; Swart et al., 2021). Incorporated into Individualized Education Plans (IEP), students work toward meeting academic, personal/social, and vocational goals to successfully transition from school to their chosen vocation (Agran et al., 2020; Raley et al., 2022; Swain et al., 2022). The skills of academic and vocational success can go hand-in-hand in many cases. For example, the ability to read, complete basic mathematic computations, and identify social cues can provide an edge for people attempting to gain employment (Bastges-Lienshöft et al., 2021; Pullu & Gömleksiz, 2021). Educators need effective interventions to ensure students meet desired vocational outcomes (Dubeau et al., 2021; Langston, 2020). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) represent one effective method to support the holistic growth of students in special education classrooms. This section provides information on the role mindfulness can play in special education classrooms. A background including historical, social, and theoretical context provides a higher understanding of how mindfulness programming can improve the quality of support and services for students and teachers in special education transition settings. Understanding the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and definitions will provide a foundation for considering the significance of why educators in special education transition settings choose mindfulness to promote a healthy growth mindset.

## **Background**

Mindfulness-based interventions have applications in a variety of settings. The earliest signs of mindfulness utilized as a formal process date to the early '80s (Dunning et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2021). As a proper intervention, mindfulness has addressed both physical health issues such as heart disease, gastrointestinal difficulties, chronic pain, and mental health issues like Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) / Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Neupert et al., 2017). Understanding how mindfulness has evolved will highlight new ways teachers in special education transition settings could utilize mindfulness interventions to support student outcomes in their classes. The theoretical perspective highlights previously addressed information regarding mindfulness-based interventions and new advances to support students in special education better.

Most importantly, reviewing the social background of mindfulness-based interventions will show how more than just students in special education classes will benefit from practicing mindfulness. Teachers, aids, and other para-professionals can participate in activities and receive the additional benefits of mindfulness. Understanding warning signs of stress and other emotions (Sun et al., 2019; Wiggs et al., 2021) leads to utilizing mindfulness to reduce burnout and other negative emotions from work-related stress. These three sections will explain the importance of how MBI could improve classrooms, schools, and communities.

### **Historical Context**

When exploring the history of mindfulness, the roots begin with the teachings of several religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Judaism, that influenced Western psychology (Cheung, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Niculescu, 2020). The emphasis on a non-judgmental, person-centered, individualistic approach gained a positive reception by researchers



such as Jung & Franz (1964) and Rogers (1951). Combining mindfulness-based interventions by Jung and Rogers improved acceptance by Western populations (Somers, 2022; White et al., 2020). Researchers and mental health practitioners supported people through these person-centered approaches, (Badham & King, 2021; McCaw, 2020) by bringing attention to the "here and now."

Credited with the formal development of mindfulness practices (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Hanh, 1975), created a school in the 1960s that focused on integrating mindfulness-based practices in academic settings in Vietnam. In addition to teaching the traditional academic curriculum, educators' time addressed the mental health needs of students. Mindfulness-based interventions did not gain popularity as a proven intervention (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; King et al., 2021) until Jon Kabat-Zinn provided information on how mindfulness can support patients' physical and mental health needs. Creating the Center for Mindfulness in 1979 in Massachusetts (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Low, 2022), continues supporting research highlighting how mindfulness-based interventions reduce anxiety, manage chronic pain, and improve relationships leading to a more fulfilling life.

Mindfulness-based interventions can provide an essential link between school and future vocations for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities required transition planning (Kauffman et al., 2017; Kucharczyk et al., 2021) as part of their Individualized Education Plans, starting around the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The purpose of these plans helped map out a time frame for a student to make sure they gain the necessary skills to exit the K-12 school setting into their post-secondary, work, or community living setting with the skills to succeed. After several reviewed transition plans, (Davenport et al., 2021; Eastman et al., 2021) identified student disability, family involvement, and school level, and each affected a student's ability to learn about the world of work. The "soft skills"

identified for student support (Deep et al., 2020; Gunarathne et al., 2021) included visual, oral, and aural skills, critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills. Through research (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Morris, 2020), integrating mindfulness could link mental/physical health needs with the coping strategies and skills to perform the tasks a person will need for life-long success.

### **Social Context**

Implementing mindfulness in special education classrooms can benefit the students, staff, and community members. Utilizing mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 2013), people could gain awareness of their actions and improve communication and self-advocacy.

Continuing (Korinek, 2021; Menzies et al., 2021), teachers would encounter higher levels of students with mental health concerns at higher rates than their education peers in special education classrooms. Therefore, teachers in special education can transfer coping skills to students can help create a supportive learning environment. In special education transition settings, (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; McCormick et al., 2019) identified how students with emotional or behavioral disorders can have increased challenges in interpersonal relationships with both peers and teachers. As students advance grades, these students struggle to improve rates and create a learning environment full of anxiety and stress (Bierman & Sanders, 2021; Korinek, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, (Alhuzimi, 2021; Klootwijk et al., 2021; Tokatly et al., 2021) identified how parents did not have school support at home. As a result, they faced challenges maintaining academic progress without additional staff support interventions to help calm and redirect students as their negative behaviors increased due to complex issues at home.

For educators in special education transition settings, facing burnout from working conditions, time pressures, and relationships between parents and administrators increase mental

health issues, (Asbury et al., 2021; Pavlidou et al., 2020). Acquiring methods to manage stress and anxiety can help reduce these adverse outcomes and provide teachable moments for students and their families to learn positive ways to interact.

### **Theoretical Context**

Given the more "hands-on" philosophy of mindfulness, a common theoretical link involves experiential learning. Experiential learning, (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017), empowers learners of all ability levels by providing real-life applications to the skills teachers transfer to the students. For example, (Altay & Porter, 2021; Beard & Wilson, 2018) identified formal mindfulness practices included in experiential learning, such as body scans and breathing exercises, to develop attention over eight weeks. Informal practices, (Hanh, 1993; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Watt, 2017), shared how everyday activities such as washing hands, talking to friends, or completing your work could improve by learning in the moment of experiential learning. Educators could utilize daily activities as teachable moments to expose students to experiencing how purposeful work leads to improved quality of work. Teachable moments became more significant, (Boltz et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2022) when realizing that 83% of families participated in online learning, which requires educators to present lessons that need students to engage in the learning process. Another way to rationalize (Feize et al., 2021; Gartland, 2021) experiential learning curriculum is by developing self-regulation, increasing attention, improving cognitive/behavioral processes, and achieving goals in lesson plans.

Students in special education have unique needs from general education peers. Rehearsing in safe settings, (Beard, 2022; Kolb & Kolb, 2017), create experiences as a group and helps understand their needs. Utilizing experiential learning with mindfulness-based interventions would advance special education literature by providing sound theories with

authentic applications for successful implementation. Students practice skills and interact with the activities to reinforce the skill taught with multiple senses, reinforcing learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kolb, 1984). In interpersonal skills or leadership, experiential learning can support students in special education to rehearse complex skills such as reflecting and testing mindfulness-based interventions (Griffith et al., 2017; Peterson et al., 2020). Processing the mindfulness experiences as a group can reinforce social skills (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017) and strengthen the impact of an intervention.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem is that many students with special education needs lack the appropriate coping skills to acquire academic and vocational skills to lead productive lives post-graduation (Brown et al., 2013; Oswald et al., 2018; Szumski et al., 2019). One way to connect coping skills that improve academic learning with the soft skills that a student will need to succeed in the workplace is mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) in special education transition settings (Sutil-Martín & Javier Otamendi, 2021; Katz et al., 2020). Addressing mindfulness in schools is important because if educators can provide students in special education transition settings with interventions to manage emotions and self-advocate (Nguyen et al., 2020; Nuske et al., 2019; Sung et al., 2019), meeting transition plans to successfully bridge gaps from school to work can occur easier.

Educators that utilize their talents to help students lead better lives reflects the teaching God showed in Matthew 25:21 (DRC1752), “His lord said to him: Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” Students in classrooms today face high levels of trauma, health issues, and other challenging environmental factors, (Miller & Santos, 2020; Yi et al.,

2021) making focusing on classroom instruction more challenging. If educators cannot successfully support at-risk, special education students these students face increased disciplinary issues, attendance problems, and challenges meeting the academic requirements necessary for graduation (Bradshaw et al., 2021; González et al., 2019; Melander et al., 2022).

Additionally, parents collaborate with educators to meet the needs of students in special education transition settings (Guldborg et al., 2017; Vidergor & Azar Gordon, 2015). Collaboration between schools and parents can not only bridge gaps in services (Azad et al., 2021; Ng & Kwan, 2020; Nye et al., 2021) but also the importance of supporting the interest in a future vocation and learning about the topic. As students maintain focus and engagement, retention of information increases, and intrinsic motivation to continue learning occurs (Malik et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021). Looking at this problem further, students in special education need to know how to improve their self-control. This skill can become more challenging when combined with physical health issues (Boccio, 2021; Dou et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2021). To lead successful lives without the support they receive from teachers (Bridges et al., 2020; Palomino, 2017), students need to gain the skills to manage the stress that life offers. Mindfulness provides a path for students and educators in special education transition settings to gain social awareness of themselves and interactions with others (Li et al., 2020; Thierry et al., 2022). While mindfulness-based interventions have shown promise in improving student outcomes (Deringer, 2017; Thierry et al., 2022; Urrila & Mäkelä, 2022; Wen et al., 2021), a limited amount of information is available regarding the benefits or challenges of implementing mindfulness in special education transition settings.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study will be to understand the perspectives of implementing mindfulness-based interventions for special education teachers in elementary special education transition settings. At this stage in the research, mindfulness-based interventions will be defined as programming that focuses on purpose in the present moment in an accepting and non-judging manner (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This case study will follow principles from Mindfulness theory as the focus for teachers in special education transition settings utilizing mindfulness-based interventions.

### **Significance of the Study**

This case study will support the special education and mental health communities significantly. Utilizing a case study approach, teachers in special education classes can have an opportunity to share both the benefits and challenges of implementing mindfulness during their academic instruction periods. Exploring mindfulness experiences through the perspective of special education teachers helps advance the theoretical significance by learning more about students' individual needs (Beard, 2022; Kolb et al., 2014). Each intervention will have a unique experience based on the interactions of the different participants (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kolb et al., 2014). Engaging more students and educators in the process (Griffith et al., 2017; Xiang et al., 2022) will increase positive interactions between student-student and student-teacher.

### **Empirical Significance**

Mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition settings need studying (Hart et al., 2021; Kirby et al., 2021), due to mental health problems affecting students by almost 50% by age 14. These increasing numbers of at-risk students now require additional interventions during the school day for support. Alarming (Hurwitz et al., 2021; Katz et al.,

2020; Kirby et al., 2021), over 50% of young people remain untreated. Regardless of the cause, schools can support students and families by identifying at-risk students and providing interventions to prevent large-scale, systemic concerns. Undiagnosed due to learning disabilities (Mazher, 2020; Richter et al., 2022), many students with learning disabilities have additional problems developing positive coping skills. This would naturally lead to poor coping and self-regulation skills as learning skills and coping processes such as listening, critical thinking, and cooperative learning experiences occur regularly in schools. Teachers purposely working with students to increase mindfulness can improve focus, attention to detail, and class climate. In addition to improving class climate, other studies have shown that mindfulness-based interventions relate to workplace stress (Manigault et al., 2021; Monroe et al., 2021), parents, and adults with severe disabilities (Aarzo et al., 2021; Jacobsen et al., 2022).

### **Practical Significance**

Highlighting the positive aspects of mindfulness practices could improve students' well-being, (Boehnke & Harris, 2021; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2019). At the elementary school level, students are learning how to learn while simultaneously coping in an age-appropriate way (McCaw, 2020; Sun et al., 2019). Additionally, with changes in classroom dynamics or behavior management that lead to positive outcomes, educators might gain interest or benefit from utilizing mindfulness (Braun et al., 2020; Hirshberg et al., 2020). Furthermore, students gain the skills to cope with adverse situations, (Hart et al., 2020; King et al., 2021) leading to solid coping abilities as adults. Issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, (Harmey, 2021; Segre et al., 2021), life as we know it can change almost instantly. Students in special education have higher risks of additional mental health concerns (Francis et al., 2021; Rumball et al., 2021). Students with disabilities require additional support to overcome their disabilities and address similar

environmental or societal problems their non-disabled peers face when provided with supportive tools (Pacheco et al., 2021; Zweers et al., 2021). Additionally, supporting these students require school districts to allocate funding for these programs, which almost doubles expenditures for general education peers (Cruz et al., 2020; Stock & Carriere, 2021). When teachers in special education possessed an intervention to provide additional support in the special education setting, districts would not need to outsource these services to outside providers (McKenzie & Bishop, 2009; Meade & O'Brien, 2018).

### **Theoretical Significance**

This study on mindfulness integration from a theoretical perspective (Beard, 2022; Kolb, 1984), involves some usage of experiential learning theory. Experiential learning requires a learner to cycle through four critical concepts (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017): experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting. For example, a student receiving a mindfulness intervention would actively participate in the exercise, process with the teacher and peer's experiences to further understand, and make adjustments to strengthen connections for future recall. Applications for mindfulness-based interventions (Good et al., 2016; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) included methods of grounding, breathing, and coming to the here and now that can support students in special education in connecting how thoughts can influence feelings and behaviors. For example, students and teachers could develop prompts that help students develop a breathing system during transitions, which students in special education transition settings might struggle with (Asbury et al., 2021; Simó-Pinatella & Carvalho, 2021). Through the learning cycle of experiential learning, students activate multiple senses in mindfulness experiences, which help reinforce learning (Beard, 2022; Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb, 1984). Teachers and paraprofessionals could rehearse skills routinely with students in the special education classroom



to improve self-awareness. Additionally, (Feize et al., 2021; Park et al., 2020) teachers who utilize mindfulness-based interventions could allow students to share experiences that enhance their ability to reflect. Students practice interpersonal skills by encouraging discussion and reflection, developing leadership (Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2019; Rooney et al., 2021), and improving the learning environment.

### **Research Questions**

Several questions help guide the interviews to accurately understand what experiences teachers in special education transition settings have with mindfulness. Authentic information regarding mindfulness practices shared through these experiences explore mindfulness in special education transition settings. Gathering this information and coding it for themes will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing mindfulness-based interventions in elementary special education classes.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of elementary teachers in special education in implementing mindfulness-based interventions during their instructional classes?

#### **Sub-Question One**

How do special education educators incorporate mindfulness into special education classes?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

What advantages do special educators observe when implementing mindfulness in their classes?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

What barriers do educators perceive when integrating mindfulness into instructional classes?

### Definitions

1. *Distress Tolerance* – “The ability to withstand broad-based negative emotional states” (Kraemer et al., 2020, p. 135).
2. *MBI* – An abbreviation for mindfulness-based interventions, (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).
3. *Mindfulness-Based Interventions* – Programming that focuses attention on purpose in the present moment in an accepting and non-judging manner, (Kabat-Zinn, 1994).
4. *Right Mindfulness* – “The path or practice that leads to the cultivation of right mindfulness is known as the noble eightfold path. The prerequisite factors for right mindfulness are the cultivation of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, and right effort (Fig. 1). This establishes the appropriate foundation for the emergence of the seventh factor—right mindfulness,” (Walpola et al., 2021, p. 2715).
5. *Stress* – “Stress can be defined as ‘external events or conditions that affect the organism,” (Segerstrom & O’Connor, 2012, p. 129).
6. *Special Education Transition Settings* – settings where students acquire skills to develop lifelong learning. “Transition needs to be considered from a holistic, life-long perspective, rather than being viewed as a single, one-off event, and the evaluation and analysis of transition should be considered over a period of time,” (Packer et al., 2022, p. 464).

## Summary

Students and educators deserve to learn and work in a safe environment. Negative issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, poor social skills, and limited coping ability make creating this environment more challenging. Even with positive support, educators are not immune to burnout, fatigue, and other risk factors associated with working in a potentially high-stress field. To support students best, teachers in today's special education classrooms will need unique skills to help students. Sharing these skills with family members help transfer skills as students face on-site, virtual, or hybrid combinations to support their students. Mindfulness-based interventions, according to Garfin et al., (2023), could provide a means of breaking cycles of systemic trauma for families. Mindfulness-based interventions could provide safe alternatives to families hesitant to medicate their children to treat various health conditions. Mindfulness-based interventions offer social opportunities for students with limited positive peer interactions and a safe setting to practice learning how to care for others, King et al., (2021). Without having insights from those providing these interventions in the location they occur, it will be challenging to continue supporting the most vulnerable students in today's schools. It is important to continue exploring how teachers in special education classrooms can instill lifelong learning by integrating mindfulness into their special education curriculum.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

A systemic review of the literature was conducted to explore the experiences special education teachers have in implementing mindfulness practices during their instructional classes. This chapter will reflect relevant research on the current status of mindfulness practices and how mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) benefit students and educators. This first section will discuss the theories applicable to mindfulness and experiential learning. Once a robust theoretical framework is established, a synthesis of recent literature regarding mindful topics such as personal development through physical health benefits, mental health benefits, emotional development, and empathy. These areas provide insight into how all people receive holistic benefits through mindfulness-based interventions. Stakeholder effects will highlight mindfulness's impact on students, parents, and educators. Lastly, literature involving factors for educators to consider implementing mindfulness in their schools will be addressed. Connecting the theory to literature highlights some areas educators can support student learning. In the end, a gap in the literature will provide a logical rationale for the current need for mindfulness-based intervention utilization in special education transition settings.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework provides an empirical basis for what and how research should be completed (Baird et al., 2020; Galvan & Galvan, 2017; Murray et al., 2012). Mindfulness theory and experiential learning are two frameworks that support mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition classrooms (An, 2021; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2019). Understanding these two frameworks highlight mindfulness-based interventions to support the holistic development of students (Hughes & Braun, 2019; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Vos et al., 2019).

The theories help scholars understand how all people connected to special education transition settings improve their quality of life by acquiring appropriate coping skills through hands-on, individualized experiences.

### **Mindfulness Theory**

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994), Somers (2022), and Watt (2017) identified the evolution of mindfulness-based interventions in schools and medical facilities. According to Husgafvel (2018) and Kabat-Zinn (2013), mindfulness-based programs have early foundations in Buddhist teachings. Mindfulness practices have addressed a variety of ailments in people, including stress, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and chronic pain (Aguilar-Raab et al., 2021; Pathrose et al., 2021; Roos et al., 2021). Additionally, Kabat-Zinn attributed inspiration for developing modern mindfulness techniques to the teachings of Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Weisbaum & Chadi, 2022). Hanh developed mindfulness methods to assist South Vietnamese students in the 1960s while supporting active Buddhist principles and supporting students affected by trauma (Bui et al., 2021; Hanh, 1975, 2008; Low, 2022).

The purpose of developing mindfulness-based skills (Hanh, 1975; Meyer & Eklund, 2020; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) is to create holistic abilities of a student rather than cram rote academic memorization upon students in class. Around 40% of students report depression or other mental health concerns, while only 17% sought treatments or support (Arslan & Allen, 2020; Fish & Saul, 2019). Through reflective and meditative practices, students can focus on tasks without feeling overwhelmed with emotions at school (Dunning et al., 2019; Hanh, 1975). Moreover, mindfulness approaches gained traction in Western medicine when Jon Kabat-Zinn developed a program over 8 to 10 weeks to increase awareness of addressing chronic pain and stress disorders (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Samuel, 2015). Not only did students participate in body

scans, where a person attempts to focus attention on each individual, but also focused on body parts and active meditation concentrated on breathing to bring attention to the present moment (Birchinall et al., 2019; Clyne et al., 2021; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2013; Miller, 2019).

Supplementary exercises could include participating in yoga to improve physical health or even everyday tasks such as hand washing or other chores completed in a purposeful, meaningful manner (Anālayo, 2020; Hassed et al., 2021).

When incorporated as part of a treatment regimen, mindfulness addresses active awareness as a sequential application, focus attention, and introspective beliefs (Husgafvel, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Rapgay & Bystrisky, 2009). Reflective self-awareness benefits students by recognizing triggers and other causes of negative emotional experiences. If students can identify the people, places, and things that trigger aversive behaviors (Lunga et al., 2021; Madden & Senior, 2018), they can practice making better choices and learning to handle situations in better ways. Similarly, (Acabchuk et al., 2021; Marks et al., 2020; Miller, 2019) mindfulness programming has successfully integrated as part of treatment programs such as mindfulness-based stress reduction programs, pain management clinics, mindfulness-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy, addiction treatment, commitment therapy, and augmentation of individual psychotherapy treatment programs.

Bringing awareness to the present moment, practitioners learn to pay attention to themselves (Husgafvel, 2018; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). With more schools introducing technology into classes, (D'Antoni et al., 2022; Mace et al., 2022) introduced mobile applications as a method of infusing technology with mindfulness applications. Utilizing technology encourages students to participate actively, and that data can be pulled from how often students use technology when given access to permitted mindfulness

meditation applications. The common theme in these approaches (Basford et al., 2020; Lombardi et al., 2021) is that a person does not just address one isolated problem. Addressing the issue while working on developing a better overall person leads to lasting life-long improvements (Harris et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2021).

### **Related Literature**

Students and educators have faced enormous pressure preparing for post-secondary vocations (ElSaheli-Elharge, 2023; Varjo et al., 2020). Standardized testing, the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional family issues, and socio-economic challenges (Asbury et al., 2021; Knopik et al., 2021; Shafana & Safnas, 2022) contribute to strain on the well-being of students and educators. Continuing, (Asbury et al., 2021; Hester et al., 2020; Jeon et al., 2022) educators in special education felt pressure adjusting to in-person, virtual, and hybrid teaching methods, increased stress, and left the profession. Utilizing a variety of delivery methods, (Schena et al., 2022; Davidson et al., 2021) reflected a need for educators to state the importance of evolving with the necessary safety practices to meet the needs of students and staff through individualizing instruction. Student performance and willingness to engage in the learning process, (De Boer et al., 2022; Mongia et al., 2019; Swanson et al., 2015) resulted in horrific outcomes and developing at-risk behaviors for students if left untreated.

In addition to observing increases in mental health illness, absenteeism from school, increased physical health issues, missed opportunities for academic and professional growth, burnout, and dropout are all possible outcomes if the risk factors are not addressed promptly (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Mongia et al., 2019). One method to reduce these adverse outcomes is acquiring mindfulness techniques. Mindfulness has been described as a reflective practice of focusing and bringing awareness to the present moment intentionally without judgment (Kabat-

Zinn, 2013; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020). By directly focusing one's attention on the present moment, a person practicing mindfulness grounds their attention and awareness of their experiences in the present moment (Creswell, 2017; Mongia et al., 2019). In addition, focusing on the present moment brings an accepting and open attitude to face a person's risk factors (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020).

### **Personal Development Benefits of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness-based interventions can provide various personal benefits (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2013). Through mindfulness training, a person can gain the skills to maintain engagement in present moments for extended periods and learn acceptance of current situations to participate in a healing program (Berdick, 2013; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Students in special education might have challenges maintaining focus in class. Through guided mindfulness interventions, a student could acquire the ability to increase focus and time-on-task behaviors (Anālayo, 2020; Jha et al., 2015). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Akoto et al., 2022; Crandall et al., 2019) describes how a person struggling to satisfy basic needs will find completing complex tasks such as teaching, learning, or studying (Ansorger, 2021; Basford et al., 2020; Fisher & Crawford, 2020). With this understanding, when students face stress and trauma, their flight or fight response triggers (Meier & West, 2020; Voulgaropoulou et al., 2022), making learning almost impossible. Engaging in mindfulness-based interventions, (Holmes, 2019; Singh et al., 2020) the importance of integrating both behavioral and cognitive processes to increase neural engagement in students improved their coping abilities. The more students utilize their senses and make connections, the stronger their abilities to do more complex tasks will develop. For brief periods, most people can manage their physical well-being. However, when stressors come from learning (Gabriely et al., 2020; Mason et al., 2022) over the course of a 7 to 8-hour day in school could leave some



students emotionally fatigued and confrontational. Learning self-care through mindfulness-based activities can allow students and staff to address struggles in a safe space while encouraging academic growth (Richardson et al., 2022; Stockall & Blackwell, 2022). Utilizing consistent processes, (Notar, 2021; Singh et al., 2020) described formal meditation and informal attentiveness as processes that lead to internal personal developmental growth.

In schools, these skills are essential while students acquire the capacity for empathy (Asbury et al., 2021; Huerta et al., 2021; Notar, 2021). Pairing mindfulness-based interventions in special education help students associate stress management skills with academic or social situations that students will need to navigate to graduate successfully. While causes and levels might be higher, educators face stressors like students that affect job performance (Fisher & Crawford, 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Utilizing mindfulness-based interventions (Huerta et al., 2021; Morris, 2020), students gain workplace skills, networking, and lifelong learning, leading to higher vocational success in future endeavors. Through mindfulness-based interventions, outcomes for students and staff can be improved so the focus can go from basic needs to academic tasks necessary for professional development (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020).

### **Physical Health**

Another consideration for utilizing mindfulness stems from students required by law to attend school. Students in special education transition settings, (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Pijl et al., 2021) often develop chronic medical problems at higher rates than non-disabled peers preventing consistent school attendance and resulting in poor academic performance. Compounding the issue (Hart et al., 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020), estimates found patients with chronic pain conditions cost society between \$560 billion and \$625 billion per year

between time lost in treatment and lost productivity at work or school. Students that struggle with physical health issues could develop attention concerns in the classroom if left unattended (Ma et al., 2022; Woodgate, 2020). When basic needs are interrupted due to ongoing health concerns, attending to higher-level needs will prove more difficult (Akoto et al., 2022; Basford et al., 2020). Students with ongoing physical health conditions become at risk for frequent absenteeism. As students miss time, academic performance will continue to suffer. These gaps in learning only amplify for students with disabilities. To meet these challenges, (Ballantyne et al., 2021; Infantes et al., 2022; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) integrating mindfulness supports the physical integration of cells improves function in human's overall health and reflects how our senses can enhance or inhibit our physical health. Through focused mindfulness, (Langer Primdahl, 2022; Mahmud, 2022) educators can assist students in special education to focus on their senses to improve their awareness of their environment and the quality of interactions with both teachers and peers.

Moreover, for lingering conditions, some families demonstrate an unwillingness to utilize medication management. Mindfulness-based interventions do not require additional chemicals to enter a student's body. This reduces the potential causes of physical health issues. Mindfulness-based interventions can address various health conditions that, if addressed, could improve the performance of students and educators (McGeechan et al., 2019; Tsang et al., 2021). Proposed as a rationale for mindfulness practitioners to experience success, (Nymberg et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2022) developing solid internal motivation, people will likely experience increased satisfaction in solving problems. Professions like teaching and other helping professions have higher job stress levels than non-education professions (Braun et al., 2020; Chevalier et al.,

2007). This will lead to stronger internal motivation for maintained performance (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Nymberg et al., 2021).

In addition to professionals experiencing physical health stress, families continue to face challenges in maintaining positive physical health from the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have had options to attend school in person, virtually, or in a hybrid version of both. Risk factors and personal choices, (Infantes et al., 2022; Vidal-Meliá et al., 2022) influenced decisions regarding changes made between in-person and virtual learning. Furthermore, they described benefits in settings that helped improve mental health outcomes for the participants. Providing access to discussion boards and virtual badges encourages program participation and increases access for students living in remote areas (Kolb, 2014; Moskowitz et al., 2021). Continuing, (Banerjee et al., 2020; Monteiro et al., 2022; Shandley et al., 2010) additional support came from interactions between participants who created positive peer interactions when close contact proved challenging, which led to higher participation, motivation to acquire skills, and improved faction.

### **Mental Health Benefits**

Maintaining robust mental health is just as important as maintaining physical health (Dunning et al., 2019; Wielgosz et al., 2019). For people that ignore mental health warning signs, minor problems could evolve into debilitating serious mental breakdowns (Deutch et al., 2021; Moïse-Richard et al., 2021). Students could witness several meltdowns in special education classrooms throughout the school day (Asbury et al., 2021; Pijl et al., 2021). Observing a peer needing restraining, escorted off-campus, or causing damage to school property could impact a student's ability to maintain attention on academic tasks (Baker et al., 2022; Bitsika & Sharpley, 2021; Verret et al., 2019). To keep success post-graduation, students need the appropriate coping skills to overcome life's adverse challenges (Anderson et al., 2021; Chandra, 2021). Exposure to

frequent negative outbursts (Frankland, 2021; Grasseti et al., 2020; Hutchison et al., 2020) can lead to increased anxiety. Even when students participate in hybrid learning formats, the pressure to perform still exists (Knoth et al., 2019; Moïse-Richard et al., 2021).

Incorporating mindfulness as part of lessons can reduce anxiety and improve performance in school (Pijl et al., 2021; Wielgosz et al., 2019). When not adequately addressed, minor issues can spiral into full-blown breakdowns. These could take various forms (Liu et al., 2021; Riden et al., 2020), such as eloping from the classroom or school, aggressive actions toward staff or students such as hitting, kicking, biting, or throwing objects, as well as shutting down and refusing to comply with adult directives. The costs of funding mindfulness-based practices in schools, (Dunning et al., 2019; Kabat-Zinn, 2013) has made mindfulness an attractive method for supporting students and educators. If administrators ignore supporting the mental health needs of students and staff, (Anderson, 2021; Baskerville, 2020; Kethineni et al., 2021) frequent absenteeism and increased behavioral problems force schools to invest even more resources to support at-risk students and staff.

The internal awareness of what a person experiences, such as thoughts, emotions, and physical signals, and the external environmental events happening in the present moment separate the mental health benefits of mindfulness into two parts to improve communication on how to successfully implement mindfulness (Charbonneau, 2019; Tarrasch & Berger, 2022; Thierry et al., 2022). Each part plays a role in supporting students in special education. If negative interactions with adults and peers trigger hostile feelings, (Schmidt & Schmiedek, 2019; Smith et al., 2021) possessing the abilities to be present and willing to learn will become more challenging. By rehearsing mindfulness skills, students can gain awareness of how those feelings could influence other interactions later in the day. Similarly, gaining control over the

environment by observing surroundings can help foster a safe environment where students can learn distraction-free (Lake & MacHale, 2021; Tannoia & Lease, 2020). Combining both parts help students gain freedom from anxiety, improved ability to think and behave autonomously, and higher rates of life satisfaction, (Katz et al., 2021; Somerville & Whitebread, 2019; Toews et al., 2020), leading to improved academic performance in the classroom.

### **Social-Emotional Development**

As schools have become more responsible for the needs of the entire student, (Davies et al., 2021; Yazici & McKenzie, 2020) addressing social-emotional needs has become even more critical. Students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities can have limited educational opportunities (McCormick et al., 2019; Skura & Świdarska, 2021). No longer does having the verbal skills necessary, but also the non-verbal ones. Gestures (Liao et al., 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2013), such as face touching could happen for some students as often as 16-23 times per hour. Understanding non-verbal communication can benefit students with disabilities by improving social relationships (Yazici & McKenzie, 2020; Zweers et al., 2021). Limiting gestures and problematic non-verbal communication can improve social relationships, leading to a supportive network for students (Creswell, 2017; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Liao et al., 2020). Understanding how a person feels (Gómez-Olmedo et al., 2020; Hoffmann et al., 2021) can provide emotional support to maintain supportive friendships.

Another essential component of socio-emotional learning involves understanding how a person's spoken words, tone, volume, and intent (Bergey et al., 2022; Schrage et al., 2020) can convey a variety of messages. Through guided support, (Jingree et al., 2006; Neale & Test, 2010) students can interpret others' speeches leading to strengthening their advocacy ability. Additionally, (Biggs & Snodgrass, 2020; Herro et al., 2021) noted, possessing the skills to

develop positive relationships with peers and educators will create a foundation for students to enjoy collaborating and sharing ideas. Finding success at the school level leads to finding similar success in a student's future vocation since the skills will transfer. Addressing social-emotional needs can positively affect students, such as better educational opportunities, fewer psychological problems, higher well-being, and improved physical and mental health as a student gets older (Gómez-Olmedo et al., 2020; Zweers et al., 2021). As schools incorporate more cooperative learning (Davidson et al., 2021; Goldman et al., 2020), students must master socio-emotional learning to support modern learners' values in professional settings.

### **Rationale for Stakeholders to Consider Mindfulness Interventions**

School board members and administrators make many decisions that influence educators and students (DeBray et al., 2020; Sutherland, 2022; Xia et al., 2020). James 1:2-4 (DRC1752) states, "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And patience hath a perfect work that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing." Educators and the families they serve to face an ever-changing society to raise families properly. When schools evaluate programs, the cost, time, and staff utilization all contribute to whether a program is utilized or not (Wong et al., 2020; Xia et al., 2020). Integrating mindfulness-based interventions, (Ivaki et al., 2021; Shanok et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2021) benefits schools through efficient, non-invasive interventions. Stakeholders need to understand that mindfulness practices help improve student performance, reduce risk factors for educators, and encourage parental support in the process (Aktan et al., 2020; Donald et al., 2019; Seema & Säre, 2019). In addition, more schools need appropriate programs to support marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ community, low socioeconomic income families, rural students with limited access to support, and cultural minorities (Arikan et al.,

2019; Göbel, & Preusche, 2019; Lander, 2020). The following rationale helps stakeholders understand how integrating mindfulness-based practices can improve outcomes for various school-related issues many systems face.

Recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and school have stressed families in new ways. Families facing new health concerns, (Lambert & Schuck, 2021; Limbers, 2021) the possibility of getting loved ones' sick forced families making education decisions more challenging regarding attending meetings and events remotely or in face-to-face formats. Ensuring support to students and families proved additionally challenging while experts created safety plans. Providing mindfulness-based interventions equip families to overcome stress and the negative consequences of pandemic-related stress. In addition, (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Schaffer et al., 2021) noted quarantine and changes in education delivery have caused concerns for educators. Students have lost significant time away from instruction due to hybrid schooling, internet issues, and other family dynamic problems (Chen et al., 2022; Wyse et al., 2020). Integrating mindfulness-based interventions can decrease the gap between learning, (Yeap et al., 2021; Yeap & Thien, 2021), and acquiring job-readiness skills for their future vocations.

Schools have a stake in encouraging mindfulness-based interventions to reduce occurrences of school-related violence. Since the school shooting in Columbine High School in 1999, (Hassed et al., 2021; Hong & Espelage, 2020) schools have experienced increased aggressive acts toward students and staff. With increases in aggressive acts, (Cornell et al., 2020; Mayer et al., 2021) school shareholders spend millions of dollars on security and safety measures to prevent school violence. Between the years 2000 to 2017, (Blair et al., 2021; Curran et al., 2020; Hong & Espelage, 2020) 250 active shooter reports were taken because people attempted to bring weapons into schools with the intention of murder. Schools are investing in metal

detectors, bulletproof glass, armed security forces, and various technological equipment to improve response times when incidents occur. Schools that seek preventative measures to address increases in school violence could reduce the likelihood of a violent incident. Identifying potential at-risk individuals, (Byars et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020) connecting them with appropriate support, and coping strategies could improve their overall quality of life. In doing so, unnecessary violence is prevented, and students maintain a quality environment for learning.

While much attention goes to the attackers and the victims, survivors receive significantly less attention. Within a person's social network, (Becker-Haimes et al., 2021; Khatib et al., 2022; Stewart et al., 2022) there is a 99.9% chance of knowing a victim of gun-related violence. Continuing, (Khatib et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2021) stated that people exposed to trauma have increased potential for psychological distress, depression, ideations of suicide, and other mental health, psychotic-like experiences. News reports often cover steps to maintain suspects of violence in custody, (Cowan et al., 2022; Crawford & Burns, 2022) and the importance of providing adequate support to trauma survivors shows equally important. Just as preventive measures to maintain school safety should be implemented, many threats could be prevented through mindfulness and stress reduction techniques that prevent aggressive, violent behaviors from happening in the first place (Devries et al., 2019; Johnson & Barsky, 2020).

### **Student Effects**

Students in special education transition settings could receive mindfulness interventions as part of their school curriculum (Emerson et al., 2020; Jones & Lee, 2022; Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2019). Slowing down and recognizing how a student feels is essential in noticing how other people might feel, which students with disabilities struggle to understand. Moreover, students pull context clues from their environment and assimilate information into what they



already know. A snowball effect of wanting to continue learning occurs through utilizing mindfulness in experiential learning as an active method for students to acquire knowledge (Kolb, 1984; Rogers, 1951). Learning is constantly occurring between hypothetical things students think will happen based on previous facts experienced and new information learned through meaningful experiences (Hägg, 2021; McCullough & Pelcher, 2021). Students and educators use past experiences which form concrete beliefs. Similarly, these here-and-now concrete experiences encourage students to manipulate the learning environment while gaining exposure to exploring material in their environment (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Kolb, 1984).

Separating general education from special education settings to provide individualized instruction (Balint-Langel et al., 2019; Kauffman et al., 2017) can help students acquire skills they might not learn in a general classroom. Special education teachers have more training and understanding of the socio-emotional needs of students with disabilities (Mihut et al., 2022; Setchell et al., 2021), through their specialized coursework. The ability to slow down and make good choices improves students' feelings about participating in school (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Sun et al., 2019). Mindfulness-based interventions can help students with disabilities, (Bruder, 2022; Vinci et al., 2021) by identifying clues in their classrooms that can help promote positive interactions with peers. Students receive and experience reductions in depression and anxiety (Donald et al., 2019; Hott et al., 2021) while improving overall well-being and mental, physical, and cognitive health by participating in mindfulness. Mindfulness-based interventions supported student development and provided time for supportive collaboration between peers (Dai et al., 2022; Meyer & Eklund, 2020; Sun et al., 2019) improving class dynamics.

Additionally, improving student quality through mindfulness (Koncz et al., 2021; Tarrasch, 2019; Tarrasch & Berger, 2022) can be a cost-saving measure for low-income districts.

Providing access to services for students that might not typically have access can help encourage student participation in schools. Regarding socio-economic status, (King et al., 2021; Six et al., 2021) as of 2019, 81% of Americans owned a smartphone. Combining that information with one-to-one technology investments schools have made since the COVID-19 pandemic ensured that almost every student has access to supportive technology (Campbell et al., 2021; Seraji et al., 2020). Students developing a stronger sense of self through mindfulness reflections, (Caqueo-Urizar et al., 2022; D'Alessandro et al., 2022) may demonstrate more willingness to engage with educators and peers, thus strengthening social skill development. Many programs can become expensive with licensing fees, but mindfulness practices can be incorporated throughout the day as transitions between classes help students refocus and re-engage in the next activity (Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019; Tarrasch, 2019).

### **Educator Effects**

Just as students need to acquire skills to reduce anxiety and depression, educators face similar challenges. Various factors influence this pressure (Agyapong et al., 2022; Hanisch et al., 2020; Mulyani et al., 2021), and when educators face high emotional demands from work increases, their productivity, and ability to care for students decrease. Teachers face higher percentages of burnout, mental health issues, stress, fatigue, and job dissatisfaction in special education settings (Oberle et al., 2020; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021). If educators can attend to their own needs, they will mentally and physically better support the needs of students in their classrooms. Understanding how exhaustion and negative feelings about work contribute to burnout can help teachers through successfully integrating mindfulness-based interventions (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Similar benefits to mindfulness practices in educators when practicing skills in class with students such as increased focus and empathy

(Bettini et al., 2020; Seema & Säre, 2019; Touloupis & Athanasiades, 2022). One-third to almost a half of teachers leave the education field within the first five years of entering the profession (Braun et al., 2020; McCullough et al., 2021; Oberle et al., 2020). Burnout contributes highly when educators leave the classroom (Pyhältö et al., 2021; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2021).

Other effects for educators include accepting self and others and reducing adverse reactions in the classroom (Park et al., 2020; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Reducing stress on educators can help create the learning environment necessary to feel safe. When students observe their teacher utilizing mindfulness skills, they will be more likely to incorporate them independently (Kolb et al., 2014; Seema & Säre, 2019). In addition to independent integration (Kirk, 2020; Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019), educators could learn mindfulness-based interventions with supportive administrators. Experiencing such skills during professional development training help provide the personal experience necessary for educators to confidently integrate and apply mindfulness within a school classroom (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019).

Another reason more educators benefit from mindfulness-based interventions involves the structure of lessons. When educators follow experiential learning models to deliver mindfulness activities to students, (Beard, 2022; Kolb & Kolb, 2017) the beginning elements involve concrete experiences. Once educators complete an activity, students learn to express their experiences. This could take various forms, such as writing in a journal, making a video entry, or actively participating in a class discussion. Through in-class experiences, (Liu et al., 2022; Verhagen et al., 2019) students reflect and come to the here and now in identifying environmental and personal cues that help to learn. Pulling essential details in experiential learning involves feelings, perceptions, and thoughts (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). During the second stage, reflective observation, students compare their experiences to

their peers. In special education settings, students can learn empathy from the experiences of others, and this helps connect how they think with how others might feel (Beard, 2022; Porter et al., 2021). Students and educators can connect experiences at school with how the application of these skills in the community or home settings during abstract conceptualization. Students might identify times when a particular strategy would not work well as an example (Kolb, 1984; Terashima et al., 2021; Tezcan et al., 2020). By processing abstract thoughts, open-ended questions could encourage the final stage, active experimentation (Beard, 2022; Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Links in education connect what a student previously learned with how they could apply the skills in future settings. Students can build off previous success and improve communication by looking at what works. Through a series of active experiences, students practice and maintain the skills of self-advocacy and emotional self-regulation (Neal, 2021; Petri et al., 2020; Tilley et al., 2020).

### **Parent Support/Effects**

Parents can face similar stress that students and educators face (Aktan et al., 2020; Chaplin et al., 2020). Getting parents on board with following mindfulness-based interventions can provide strategies to support their child at home and in the community. Parents develop higher levels of depression, anxiety, and mental health concerns (Lunsky et al., 2021; Perlowski & Wright, 2021) than parents with students without identified disabilities. Many parents could be new to having a child with a disability. Trying to manage challenging behaviors could become frustrating and parents might not have enough strategies to support their child's needs. Parents who utilize and understand mindfulness practices become more aware of how they interact with their children and how their mood influences daily interactions (Raulston et al., 2021; Stockall & Blackwell, 2022). Several examples included observing and describing how they feel in the

present moment, non-judging and fully accepting the parent and child as they are, acting with awareness, and non-reactivity between parent and child when interactions occur (D'Antoni et al., 2022; Osborn et al., 2020).

Trying to juggle the needs of a child with disabilities with a parent's own mental or physical health concerns can increase issues (Ho & Liang, 2021; Lunskey et al., 2021). In addition, (Sell et al., 2021; Wolpert et al., 2015) a child has a 70% chance of developing mental health issues if a parent presents with similar problems. To demonstrate this importance, (Graaf et al., 2022; Wolpert et al., 2015) a 30 – 50% chance that several health issues could reveal if both parents in the household have existing mental health issues. Parents that successfully integrate mindfulness into parenting utilize fewer authoritarian and permissive parenting styles (Calvete et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019). Awareness in the present moment can help parents and support students with disabilities (Aktan et al., 2020; Calvete et al., 2021). Parents that vicariously learn mindfulness-based interventions through coordination with their child's teacher could gain the ability to maintain a calm thought process (Aouad & Bento, 2020; Stockall & Blackwell, 2022) while dealing with the challenging behaviors their child exhibits.

In addition to having a student with disabilities, many parents contend with their own negative experiences in school. Supporting parents through mindfulness can help parents manage projecting negative feelings toward students receiving special education support in school (Chaplin et al., 2020; Lavan et al., 2019). Similarly, (Aktan et al., 2020; Ardiç & Olçay, 2021; Kütük et al., 2021) parents of children with disabilities experience high rates of burnout, quality of life differences, and life satisfaction impairments. If schools can support parents through mindfulness, they will gain connectedness to school and demonstrate a willingness to participate in the learning process (Bewei & Obi, 2020; Hwang et al., 2021). Involving parents in teaching

mindfulness processes to students on the autism spectrum led to increased collaboration and successful utilization of skills (Chaplin et al., 2020; Ridderinkhof et al., 2019). Collaboration improves the home-school-community lines necessary for students to access high-quality support networks.

### **Purpose for MBI in Special Education Programs**

Students in special education programs have unique plans to address current school needs and plan for future vocational interests, (Harvey et al., 2020; Toews et al., 2020). The challenges students with disabilities have in developing appropriate relationships only increase when they lack the methods of coping with age-related stressors (Dipeolu et al., 2020; Engels et al., 2016; Swart et al., 2022). Through mindfulness-based interventions, students in exceptional education gain “soft skills” such as proper eye contact, interpersonal skills, and self-advocating that lead to future success in their chosen occupations (Athamanah & Cushing, 2019; Donald et al., 2019). A student’s individualized education plan involves transition planning (Almalki, 2021; Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Russo, 2019). These plans outline future personal and vocational goals for the student. Over a student’s academic curriculum, goals developed in collaboration with the educators and families ensure completion of their student’s needs.

While educators and students reflect on the lessons and activities within the facilitator role, encouraging participation leads to a classroom environment where positive, trusting relationships grow through ongoing conversations in small group settings (Cipriano & Barnes, 2021; Rice, 2022). In a subject-expert role, educators support students in special education by modeling appropriate behaviors and demonstrating empathy, encouraging students to reflect on their experiences, and encouraging inquiry to connect what they learn and how it will support future goals. In addition to following a standard-setter/evaluator role, (Bolick et al., 2020; Kolb

& Kolb, 2017; Yazici & McKenzie, 2020) educators help students meet goals by following and practicing performance requirements. Utilizing state standards and IEP goals help guide the implementation of these plans (Abu-Alghayth et al., 2022; Kadian, 2022). The final educator role in the learning cycle, the coaching role, involves assisting students in applying their problem-solving skills. Utilizing this style of facilitating learning (Opdal, 2021; Wright et al., 2021) can surprise teachers accustomed to traditional lecture-style educational pedagogy. Furthermore, using an experiential learning mindset transfers the skills to the student and educator while forming a positive environment where inquiry is encouraged in mindfulness activities (Alvi & Gillies, 2021; Marey et al., 2022).

Unique to special education, students are required to complete transition plans. While integrating mindfulness-based interventions into transition planning, (Galles et al., 2019; Stockall & Blackwell, 2022), fewer negative thoughts were described by students, which improved vocational aptitude. This will make advancing from K-12 education to post-secondary / vocational choice smoother. Three components of effective mindfulness practices, attention, intention, and attitude, are the building blocks for creating a learning environment where all students feel safe (Ergas, 2019; McCaw, 2020). There is a common link between mindfulness-based interventions and the following experiential learning theory to have foundations in Buddhist teachings and focus on the present moment for learning (Hanh, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Due to the unique demands of students in special education, these plans will often outline skills a student will acquire to ensure a successful progression from the school setting to a vocation or post-secondary school. Primary goals, (Almalki et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022) involve matching the plans to the classes offered to address those needs adequately. Secondary

goals should include interpersonal “soft skills” to maintain a living in modern society and self-advocate for needs and services. Among these “soft skills,” (Chen, 2019; Gaona et al., 2019) identified included methods of coping with stress, conversation, interview, communication skills, and other vocational aptitude training to maintain a living. With so many skills needing transferred to students in special education classrooms, utilizing mindfulness-based interventions assist students in meeting the multiple goals outlined in their plans.

Mindfulness-based interventions utilized in special education could help in gaining learning identity (Beard & Wilson, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Students might experience negative self-talk from not communicating or other academic-related struggles students face. Over time, negative thoughts can lead to decreased self-confidence and unwillingness to try new things. Students that fail to venture out of their comfort zones, (Beard, 2022; Fryer et al., 2021), will struggle to find their true passion. The negative feelings of self could then be projected onto peers and damage their ability to maintain positive support. Through experiential learning (Lawton, 2021; Vernon et al., 2017), students in special education would learn to understand the trial-and-error learning method. Students would gain an understanding that mistakes are part of the process. As students gain support from the teacher and peers to process, they improve their ability to talk and learn from others (Biggs et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). Through the development of an inter-connected classroom, students feel safe in their learning environment to experiment and can embrace the learning, which leads to improved focus and value for education.

### **Behavior Modification**

One of the most substantial reasons educators implement mindfulness is behavior management. Traditional forms of behavior modification for students with disabilities



(Bronstein et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2021) could include applied behavior analysis, an approach utilized by professionals to understand antecedents, behaviors, and consequences to shape behavior, and social interventions. These intervention groups acquire skills while learning from each other, cognitive-behavioral therapy, where a professional works through the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of a student, and medication management (Ho et al., 2021; Menzies et al., 2021). While all of these have shown effective means for changing behaviors, many of these approaches cannot provide integration during the school day without altering the academic curriculum. Students with emotional disturbance (ED) special education services (Barrett et al., 2020; McKenna et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2020) often receive academic instruction in general and special education classes. To understand the importance of the least restrictive environment, educators must develop plans to access the appropriate learning environment (McKenna et al., 2019; Orr et al., 2020; Wehmeyer et al., 2021). Educators in special education transition settings (Floress et al., 2018; Pepe & Addimando, 2013), face challenging behaviors more frequently than general education co-workers. Gaining access to tools to manage problematic behaviors can differentiate between teachers thriving or surviving in special education (Donald et al., 2019; Kolb et al., 2014; Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020).

Continuing, (Chen, 2022; Larson et al., 2020; Park et al., 2020) new teachers participating in pre-service programs lack programming dedicated to having skills to manage challenging behaviors in order to create a cooperative classroom environment for supporting the needs of all students. With regards to class climate, utilizing mindfulness-based interventions to support students' improved concentration, focus, sound decision-making, and appropriate coping skills (Kasson & Wilson, 2017; Long et al., 2018; Park et al., 2020; Whitfield et al., 2021). Using mindfulness can help teachers navigate multiple challenging behaviors in their special education

classrooms while empowering students with the tools to self-regulate and de-escalate. As part of a student's individualized education plan, (Galles et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020) noted that developing transition plans that support behavioral and vocational post-graduation goals is essential for successful progression into adulthood after schooling. Behavior management skills can help students gain employment skills to achieve vocational goals (Esmmaeelbeygi et al., 2020; Schuman-Olivier et al., 2020).

Behavioral tasks such as reflecting can help students in special education improve creative thinking and curiosity (Altay & Porter, 2021; Henriksen et al., 2020). Participating in reflective mindfulness practices can support students' abilities to think critically, making them valuable future employees. Three modalities of mindfulness contexts within education help both educators and students frame the worldview for promoting the whole student (Brito et al., 2021; de Carvalho et al., 2021). By expanding the understanding of mindfulness to students, educators, and families, students learn to manage stressors in their environment that could be causing problems. Reasons students may act out (Cothran et al., 2009; Martínez-Fernández et al., 2021; Romi et al., 2015) could include times they do not feel comfortable and do not possess the social skills to navigate interpersonal situations. By introducing mindfulness interventions, students learn to identify the sources of their frustrations and ways to maintain composure.

### **Role of Mindfulness in Special Education Transition Settings**

In an era of high-stakes testing, many educators might wonder how the application and usefulness of mindfulness can benefit classes when attention shifts to testing. While educators, families, and students may dislike or even opt out of testing, promotion from grade levels, or vocational certifications, having test-taking strategies can help students maintain composure during those stressful times (Chishti & Abdul Majid Khan Rana, 2021; Cohen, 2006; Steele,

2007). For pre-service educators, understanding how to integrate mindfulness-based interventions can improve classroom management and class environment (Albrecht, 2019; Li et al., 2020). Utilizing mindfulness as a classroom intervention or test-taking strategy can help ease anxieties and bring focus to the questions on the exam (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Thierry et al., 2022). Educators provide skills to their students by reducing stress, improving health, and transferring skills for long-term vocational success (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Kenwright et al., 2021; Seema & Säre, 2019). In 1977, the United States Office of Education defined specific learning disabilities that required a disability of one or more psychological processes to successfully communicate utilizing listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, or mathematical calculations, (Kavale et al., 2009; Schussler, 2020). By specifically outlining qualifications for special education services, justifications for interventions such as mindfulness can provide help for students to master the skills both observed and hidden for future success.

Additionally, working cooperatively with peers improves social skills and self-advocating (Davidson et al., 2021; Goldman et al., 2020; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Non-traditional skills (Deep et al., 2020; Koslouski et al., 2023) necessary for interacting with other people such as communication, teamwork, general problem-solving, and work ethic develop that students need to learn for gaining essential “soft skills” to become successful professionals in future vocations. One thing that separates experiential learning from traditional educational practices involves the role of the educator, which becomes a facilitator of learning in experiential learning (Davidson et al., 2021; Kolb, 1984). Similar to the experiences students face, educators in special education transition settings experience different roles, such as coach, facilitator, subject expert, and standard-setter or evaluator, while participating as a facilitator of learning (Amigó & Lloyd, 2021; Kolb & Kolb, 2017).

Utilizing mindfulness in classrooms can help students accept differences and gain acceptance from peers (Mackenzie et al., 2020; Seema & Säre, 2019). Slowing down and focusing on the present moment help educators and students create a positive learning environment where all people feel respected (Kenwright et al., 2021; McCaw, 2020). In addition, learning to control emotions can lead to increased support in both the classroom and the community. For students identified as gifted or talented, the blessing and curse of their ability come with additional pressure to maintain high standards of achievement. Mindfulness themes (Mofield & Peters, 2019; Olton-Weber et al., 2020), identified in mindfulness programs follow common approaches such as accepting their body, reflections, emotions, attending behaviors (being in the moment), tender, and habits. Through participation, students can identify when they are applying internal pressure to perform and process how it affects their ability to complete academic tasks and cooperate with teachers and peers (Klebanova, 2022; Sevilla-Liu, 2021).

Experiences practiced over time become reinforced ideas of how the world functions (Ergas, 2019; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Utilizing mindfulness-based classroom interventions can help structure the school day to increase attention and self-awareness for students (Frank et al., 2021; Strait et al., 2020). In special education transition environments, students have increased chances (Bettini et al., 2020; Gilmour & Henry, 2020; Giota & Gustafsson, 2021; Lake & MacHale, 2021) to experience stress, depression, or reduced peer interactions. Mindfulness-based interventions can support students from mild to severe mental functioning levels. In order to face a variety of challenges, students today must possess the ability to multi-task and collaboratively work with peers (Bejnö et al., 2022; Kudesia et al., 2022; Skalski et al., 2021). Introducing mindfulness in special education transition settings can help develop the necessary coping skills to reduce anxiety and frustration when working through complex tasks (Axelrod & Santagata,

2021; Ridderinkhof et al., 2021). By introducing mindfulness skills to students, when scholastic stressors such as multitasking are pressed on students, mindfulness-based interventions can reduce mental fatigue that could lead to anxiety and negative social outbursts (Kenwright et al., 2021; McCaw, 2020). Learning mindfulness techniques can lead to stronger motivation to succeed in class and avoid adverse outcomes (Mackenzie et al., 2020; McCaw, 2020).

### **MBI as a Short-Term Intervention**

Some educators might be hesitant to implement mindfulness. Fears of the intervention being too religious could make buy-in from administrators challenging (McCaw, 2020; Placeres & Ordaz, 2021). Others might need to see mindfulness in action before committing a full-scale implementation to work. The benefits of a brief intervention, (Axelrod & Santagata, 2021; Liao et al., 2020; Meyer & Eklund, 2020) often stay with students when introduced as a short-term intervention even after the initial intervention is concluded. As a short-term intervention, mindfulness-based interventions can improve outcomes in a few short sessions to address complicated issues such as trauma-informed practices (Lander, 2020; Skaar et al., 2021). Students in special education transition settings would benefit from interventions in a smaller setting with time to practice skills in a safe environment. Students starting school experience less stress and negative outcomes when having exposure to mindfulness-based interventions (Ballard & Bender, 2022; D'Alessandro et al., 2022; Koncz et al., 2021). Students that learned (Hawkes & Neale, 2020; Santos Alves Peixoto et al., 2022) how to self-regulate emotions cooperate better with peers and demonstrate in the classroom the ability to meet the requirements of scholastic performance. Through brief interventions, students experience feelings of calmness, and inner peace (Beauchemin et al., 2008; Boxmeyer et al., 2021; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Continued benefits of short term-interventions come from hearing the shared experiences of peers. Additional

evidence found adults, students, and their peers sharing mindful experiences eased anxieties (Croom et al., 2021; Preston & Spooner-Lane, 2019; Thierry et al., 2022), and believed the positive experiences peers shared could be achieved in their own reflections.

Students new to school face new learning environments, academic requirements, and social skills. Schools implementing mindfulness-based interventions utilized a short period not to take away from academic instruction times (Emerson et al., 2020; Jones & Lee, 2022; McCaw, 2020). Another benefit of using short-term intervention is that counselors, social workers, and other support people can help with the intervention without taking time away from instructional practices (Berdick, 2013; Palacios & Lemberger-Truelove, 2019). Many short-term programs last between 20-45 minutes per session, and the skills are transferrable (Duane et al., 2021, Emerson et al., 2020; Skaar et al., 2021). Once demonstrated successfully, taking the lessons from an isolated special education classroom setting and progressing knowledge to a full-school implementation would leave a positive impact on the lives of all students willing to participate.

Another reason schools might examine utilizing brief interventions for students, (Dariotis et al., 2017; Flook et al., 2010) involves time utilization. Educators attempt to maximize time during the students' days to complete paced instruction. With a majority of a school day structured with core academic content, limited time could be devoted to other interventions. If administrators do not value proactive interventions, only a tiny percentage of students and staff could receive mindfulness-based interventions to demonstrate value (Kim et al., 2021; Pizarro-Ruiz et al., 2021). Therefore, mindfulness as a brief intervention could provide evidence to skeptical administrators of positive results even in short experiences.

### **Full-School Integration Across Classrooms**

Within the hours of school operation, (Gaunkar et al., 2021; Goo et al., 2020; Sheinman et al., 2018) students need to have both the academic skills for adulthood and opportunities to learn how to provide self-care properly. Falling under the social-emotional learning (SEL) category, schools that utilize mindfulness across classrooms, (Hoge et al., 2021; Thierry et al., 2022), claimed supporting students by meeting self-regulation behaviors, awareness of emotions, social skills such as perspective taking, and problem-solving as a relationship skill. Schools that implement a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) programs, (Hunter-Dehn, 2021; Stratford et al., 2020), can provide mindfulness-based interventions as part of a district implementing Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3 interventions. If integrated fully in classrooms, educators could incorporate skills (Monteiro et al., 2022; Sheinman et al., 2018), such as mindful yoga-based movements, poses, and specific guided imagery practices. Examples of guided imagery include focusing on posture, breath, body sensations, environmental clues, emotions, thoughts, and emotions. Students in special education specifically could use these times as “check-ins” to understand the connections between what they are feeling and how it connects to their present behaviors (Eklund et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2019). With additional support provided in class, negative feelings could process into rational decision-making practices. Each session could last around 45 minutes (Goldberg et al., 2018; Sheinman et al., 2018; Strohmaier et al., 2021), which could be justified as part of ongoing personal development goals written in an IEP. Educators willing to integrate mindfulness as a whole-class initiative could observe improved emotional identification and expression, increased time on task, improved ability to self-regulate behaviors, compassion, and social interactions with adults and peers, (Bokoch & Hass-Cohen, 2021; Hudson et al., 2020).

Students face challenges in how educators present and deliver the education curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic (Boltz et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2017). Experiential learning supports student learning in hybrid formats through a consistent process of experimenting, processing, and adjusting to previously understood knowledge (Boltz et al., Kolb et al., 2014). By structuring experiences in this manner, learners have more ownership of the experiences and make the connections in the learning material more meaningful (Goldman et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2017). One way the structure of how students understand experience involves recounting their immediate surroundings in order to reinforce pulling details in making deeper connections (Kolb, 2014; Morris, 2020). Your senses identify sights, temperature, smells, and sensations in your body according to (Tan et al., 2021; Zimmerman & Land, 2022), while the other method involves describing the experiences. These require a deeper understanding of what happens to explain senses to other people. Experiential learning supports mindfulness-based interventions as it connects students to their world.

Increasing student awareness and empathy can also support full-school initiatives such as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) implementation. Increased coping skills when utilized as a part of the curriculum (Emerson et al., 2020; Volanen et al., 2020) when students had opportunities to review mindfulness materials. Integrating mindfulness in school is safe for students to rehearse skills to handle stressful situations (Hooshyar et al., 2019; Volanen et al., 2020). Helping educators comprehend the importance of integrating mindfulness-based interventions can improve implementation outcomes (Kenwright et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021). If students can successfully navigate these challenges while in school, they will likely utilize these skills after graduation (Kolb et al., 2014; Sheinman et al., 2018). Having a system for integrating mindfulness across grade levels would benefit students by seeing various



educators utilize mindfulness in multiple settings. Complete programs such as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS), (Liu et al., 2021; Orr et al., 2020; Rashedi et al., 2020) lend opportunities to support mindfulness programming as part of the multi-tiered system. Over time, this reinforcement leads to skills transferred from educators to students.

### **Summary**

Students face enormous pressure to perform academically in the classroom while developing the "soft skills" and interpersonal skills necessary to succeed in their chosen vocation after graduation. While the work demands increase, many students lack the skills needed to manage the orders required for success in today's society (Beard & Wilson, 2018; McCullough et al., 2021; Yazici & McKenzie, 2020). If left untreated, these challenges can multiply for teachers and students with disabilities (McCullough et al., 2021; Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Just as important, educators need to utilize creative methods to ensure those skills are being transferred to students (Beard, 2022; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Parents and educators in special education transition settings want the best for their students. If they can reduce negative emotions in themselves, they can transfer those skills to the children they encounter to lead happier lives. One way to reduce stress and anxiety among students and educators in special education transition settings is to integrate mindfulness-based interventions (MBI). Students in special education utilize extra support at school and with parents collaboratively. Collaboration has increased out of necessity in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes in routine (Fefer et al., 2020; Infantes et al., 2022) and lack of support as reasons for observations of behavioral issues. Learning and applying mindfulness-based interventions can lead educators and families towards collaboration on best practices to ensure that the needs of students for consistency at school and home.

Defined as paying attention in a specific manner intentionally on purpose (Kabat-Zinn, 1994; Wigelsworth & Quinn, 2020), mindfulness redirects control away from environmental stimuli and onto the practitioner. Mindfulness skills support school activities such as focusing and staying on task. Being present while presenting a lesson can lead to a student making more connections to help retain information (Hanh, 1975; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic placed additional stressors on students that affected their learning ability (Breux et al., 2021; Ergas, 2019). Increased control over emotions and behaviors can transfer learning in school to earning and keeping meaningful employment after graduation. In a school setting, educators can provide opportunities to rehearse strategies that students can utilize on job sites (Kolb & Kolb, 2017; McCullough et al., 2021). Providing real applications to mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2013; Kolb & Kolb, 2017), students, educators, and families can acquire the tools necessary to overcome emotional challenges in their lives.

Mindfulness interventions, utilized mainly as a brief intervention, have more frequently documented information about teachers' experiences integrating mindfulness into special education classrooms. If implemented as part of a curriculum (Emerson et al., 2020; Volanen et al., 2020), students can rehearse and reinforce mindfulness-based lessons until the coping skills are rehearsed into recall. Rehearsing mindfulness skills utilizing experiential learning principles can allow students to rehearse skills safely. As they practice and rehearse skills, educators can process experiences to ensure students identify the present-moment abstract concepts. Over time, students will internalize self-regulating thoughts that inhibit academic progress. A gap exists in the literature to understand what experiences are like for educators in special education integrating mindfulness-based interventions during special education instructional classes. Recent literature supports all people's academic, personal, and social-emotional development

through practiced rehearsed mindfulness experiences. Understanding these factors culminates with understanding what experiences teachers in special education classes have with integrating mindfulness into their classroom instruction? Utilizing the information gained will provide communication that can share with stakeholders in education wishing to support best practices to support at-risk students (Aktan et al., 2020; Donald et al., 2019; Seema & Säre, 2019; Tan et al., 2021). By understanding potential barriers, supports develop with administrative input to support implementation and improve services for educators, students, and families participating in the educational process.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this case study will be to understand the perspectives of implementing mindfulness-based interventions for special education teachers in elementary special education transition settings. Many students with special education needs lack the appropriate academic and vocational coping strategies to acquire skills to lead productive lives post-graduation (Cole et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021). For this chapter, the rationale for why a case study research design best supports understanding why students with special education need examining. Unique to the students in Cambria/Blair/Bedford Counties, a case study makes sense to identify the needs of vested stakeholders. Sections in this chapter include research design, research questions, setting, and participant information. Additionally, information regarding my positionality in the research and frameworks that support mindfulness-based interventions increase the awareness for the challenges and supports students in special education receive. Research questions open dialogue through verbal prompts to identify the problem's characteristics accurately (Tasker & Cisneroz, 2019; Weller et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Information regarding the setting and participants will help understand the unique demographics and setting where the behaviors occur in this specific case. This information additionally helps readers understand the cultural context where the case study research takes place. Descriptions of the assumptions and positions clarify the rationale for utilizing the case study approaches for mindfulness-based intervention research. In addition, this chapter provides descriptions of assumptions, procedures, and how I will collect the information for this study. I conclude this chapter with steps taken to ensure ethical guidelines ensuring consideration for and respecting the participant's rights.

## Research Design

For this study, I selected a qualitative research approach to understand the experiences of special education teachers implementing mindfulness. In qualitative research (Køster & Fernandez, 2021; Langstrand & Drotz, 2016) a case study research design supports research by scholars in the human and social science fields. Working with educators and gaining their first-hand experiences (Peterson, 2019; Stake, 1995), requires a qualitative approach to capture the authentic experiences of the participants. Precisely, a case study approach will best capture special education teachers' unbiased opinions and perspectives in the field. A case study is appropriate for collecting data bias-free and understanding experiences such as mindfulness implementation (Chong et al., 2021; Stake & Ebrary, 2006) as it is happening in special education classes. Utilizing a case study approach ensures the perspectives described by educators through their shared, (Hancock & Algozzine, 2021; Reinhardt et al., 2018) understood experiences.

Through various interviews, educators collect data and interpret meaning based on coding the educators' responses, (Giorgi, 2009; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, (2019). Researchers note procedures to meet case study research include understanding previous research, completing a literature review, selecting a design, gathering methods for compiling data, and reviewing findings, as noted by (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hancock & Algozzine., 2021; Stake & Ebrary, 2006). Because the focus is on the experiences of special education teachers, (Peterson, 2019; Shelton & Smith, 2015) recognized that structured activities such as mindfulness are socially constructed activities. Utilizing a qualitative research method allows the positive and negative aspects of mindfulness to highlight implementation methods naturally.

## **Research Questions**

This next section in chapter three details the central and sub-question research questions that guide the rest of the research. The questions focused on understanding the experiences special education teachers have in implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classrooms. By exploring these essential questions, special education educators will identify barriers and benefits as to why and how mindfulness-based interventions help maintain support for students' needs in special education classrooms.

### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of elementary teachers in special education in implementing mindfulness-based interventions during their instructional classes?

### **Sub-Question One**

How do special education educators incorporate mindfulness into special education classes?

### **Sub-Question Two**

What advantages do special educators observe when implementing mindfulness in their classes?

### **Sub-Question Three**

What barriers do educators perceive when integrating mindfulness into instructional classes?

## **Setting and Participants**

The following section in this chapter will provide an overview of the research setting and a general description of the participants. The setting explains why the Pennsylvania research setting was selected, but demographic information about why the setting is worthy of research.

Specifically, targeting teachers in K-6 special education transition settings will help in investigating the perspectives of special education teachers utilizing mindfulness. Importance of specifically targeting teachers and elementary special education students was determined because in elementary schools, students work in smaller settings where incorporating mindfulness might occur more frequently. Students in special education often participate in general education classes as part of a least restrictive environment (LRE). Observing success in special education classrooms could open the door for general education staff to implement mindfulness. While a more thorough account will explain details in a separate section, a brief explanation highlights the qualifications of the participating educators.

### **Setting**

This primary setting would include 10-15 elementary special education teachers representing school systems in Pennsylvania. The representing pool would reflect demographic information, selected from the United States Census (2021), which identified that 91.4% of people 25 years or older between 2015 and 2019 earned at least a high school diploma. However, only 21.3% achieved a bachelor's degree or higher. Additionally, 17 public elementary schools provide education to primary school students in the area of this study, according to School Information (2021). The selection of rural special education transition settings has shown that issues such as systemic poverty, educator personnel shortages, and access to services increase challenges to meeting the unique needs of students in special education (Hott et al., 2021; Turnage, 2020). Continuing with information on the setting, (United States Census, 2021) the median household income in the study's location was approximately \$49,181 from years 2015 - 2019. The approval process will require permission from the school districts to allow a vast pool of participants to complete the research goals. Utilizing this location serves as a convenience

sample pool. Many counties in neighboring areas share similar demographics, which is important because the results could be applicable to support needs in other rural states or areas. The leadership structure in these school flows from the local school boards, to the school district superintendent, building level principals, staff, and students/family members. Each local school district has flexibility to make educational decisions that meet the needs of their staff, students, and community stakeholders.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study consist of ten elementary public school teachers with a valid state teaching license certified in special education. These educators in special education transition settings provide students in grades kindergarten through 6th grade academic instruction in a variety of settings. The range will consist of 10-15 educators with a mixed number of qualified service years. The majority of the educators will be White, Non-Hispanic with both male and female participants. Given the limits on the participation pool from geographic and special education needs, multiple schools received contact via email and phone message to secure the necessary participants. The participants comprised from three schools in a similar area. All participants have earned at least a bachelor's degree, with some obtaining a master's degree or master's equivalent.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The frameworks will support why I selected the research development in this section. Education is a social experience for both teachers and students. My role would be outside the data collected rather than adding my own experiences (Merriam, 1988, Merriam 1998; Neubauer et al., 2019), by utilizing a case study approach. Therefore, explaining social constructivism helps to understand my role in the research. Collaboration between educators, students, families,



and myself maintained consistently for the successful completion of this study. In addition, discussing the philosophical assumptions provide insights into the unique experiences each faces when experiencing mindfulness-based interventions since students interact with parents, educators, and peers daily (Lunsky et al., 2021; Stake & Ebrary, 2006).

### **Interpretive Framework**

The interpretive framework this research follows involves utilizing a social constructivism lens. Describing the approach, (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Merriam, 1998) social constructivism fits research best when seeking a better understanding of how the world works based on real meanings and experiences. Mindfulness-based interventions could support people with health concerns such as brain injuries, understanding emotions, lowering stress, and supporting interactions between students and caregivers (Gray, 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Understanding the role mindfulness could play is essential to recognize because many students in special education experience physical health concerns or adverse childhood trauma (ACT) at rates up to almost 45%, in addition to learning problems (Rumball et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2020).

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

Different assumptions can support the research by providing a structure for the following research methods (Matta, 2021; Stake & Ebrary, 2006). By utilizing a variety of beliefs, the foundation for why mindfulness-based interventions can establish a solid base of knowledge. Each assumption provides different perspectives on the research and why it is vital to the current study. The philosophical beliefs assist researchers to improve understanding of the evidence and link the research with how scholars understand the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1988).

### ***Ontological Assumption***

The nature of mindfulness focuses on how people re-think learning environments and how individual bodies can improve working environments and classrooms (Axelrod & Santagata, 2021; Simó-Pinatella & Carvalho, 2021). In completing a mindfulness-based intervention, (Brito et al., 2021; Neubauer et al., 2019) each person could have a different experience with this methodology. This individualized experience would cause people to question the nature of mindfulness. Mindfulness-based interventions (Boehnke & Harris, 2021; Colaianne et al., 2023) could prove useful as a better way people can care for themselves and their communities. Since each person will have their own experiences with mindfulness, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hanh, 1975) multiple realities will be identified through interviews and listening to the individual stories of people. By focusing on the present moment, people "in the moment" can observe and develop empathy for others. Continuing (O'Connor Bones et al., 2021; Whitehead et al., 2021), traditional support for students with special education needs lacks qualified staff and coordinates care and additional support increases reliance on parents or other caregivers to bridge the gap. Addressing these concerns, (Brown et al., 2021; Colaianne et al., 2023) reported that access to mindfulness-based interventions could support the overall health of the at-risk person, educators, and guardians.

### ***Epistemological Assumption***

For this qualitative research, getting close to the special education teachers is essential and helps address the epistemological assumption, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Staller, 2013). Educators might struggle with understanding what constitutes best practices of implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classrooms. Teachers could gain support (Adams & McLennan, 2021; Kolb & Kolb, 2017) and feel heard through engagement and reflective

practices. Teachers sharing their experiences will shed light on how they observe mindfulness-based interventions applied in their classrooms. If they do not utilize these interventions, sharing why they do not use these approaches can lead to a better understanding of what supports lead to successful implementation of mindfulness-based interventions in special education classrooms. Separating the educators in special education transition settings from myself (Neubauer et al., 2019; Staller, 2013) while conducting various interviews and data collection, minimizes the limitations of interview data.

### ***Axiological Assumption***

Students, educators, and families can benefit from learning appropriate skills to manage stress and overcome challenges in their lives (Aktan et al., 2020; Almalki et al., 2021; Frank et al., 2021; Kethineni et al., 2021). However, all participating parties need to actively engage in the process to reap the benefits of the intervention. Special education classrooms have a higher potential to observe behavior issues (Beauchemin et al., 2008; Bettini et al., 2020; Jung & Lee, 2020), and addressing these concerns through mindfulness-based interventions can support the development of the cardiovascular and respiratory systems (Aguilar-Raab et al., 2021; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Learning more about the experiences of educators in special education through interviews expands the knowledge of implementing mindfulness into special education instruction, (Lee et al., 2023; Mischenko et al., 2022).

### **Researcher's Role**

With appropriate permission and consent, I collected data regarding the experiences of educators in special education settings. For this study, I started the process by gaining the approval of my dissertation chair and the School of Education at Liberty University. With their approval, I submitted documentation to the IRB and successfully received their approval. With

all consents on file, I contacted schools to gain permission to work with elementary special education teachers representing grades K-6. Superintendents from schools in Pennsylvania and Maryland received communication for site approval. After receiving approval from three sites, I contacted special education teachers in the districts for consent. Interested teachers reviewed the information and emailed consents back to me. Next, I collaborated with the educators to find times to conduct the interviews, and submit the other forms for educators to complete. No conflicts in job duty interfered with data collection throughout the process. I had no authority over any volunteer participants participating in this study. The importance of reducing risks to the environment when working with people, (Boser, 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2018), leads to understanding why people have thoughts that influence how they interact with the environment. Participants can disclose their authentic experiences utilizing mindfulness-based interventions by providing a safe atmosphere.

### **Procedures**

The procedures began with obtaining dissertation chair and site approval to begin research. After receiving notification from Liberty University's education department, the documentation for IRB approval was submitted. No data collection occurred until I received the necessary written permission from both IRB and Liberty University. In order to obtain bias-free data, (Heath et al., 2018; Williams, 2021) a more accurate picture of what experiences teachers are facing by linking different data collection methods. Several steps will ensure consistency in implementing procedures for this study. Efforts guarantee that systems include meeting with prospective teachers, selecting the sample, and utilizing at least three data collection methods to ensure data triangulation. The ongoing dialogue between the dissertation committee and myself consistently followed established programs and systems throughout the dissertation process. I

gained the necessary policies and permissions from the IRB before initiating any data collection steps.

### **Permissions**

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how researchers conduct research (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Ford et al., 2021). With increased use and access to technology, providing in-person and meeting virtual options protected teacher participation and increased the likelihood of involvement. Obtaining the necessary permissions was paramount to the completion of this study. Once the dissertation committee approved the plan for collecting data, I obtained consent from prospective schools in the participating setting to contact elementary special education teachers. Upon site and supervisor approvals, I provided documentation to the IRB and obtained full consent to begin collecting data. Before beginning recording of interviews, teachers had an opportunity to ask off-the-record questions and receive answers to any questions regarding the study. The participating teachers understood any information regarding students, disabilities, or school districts would change to pseudonyms to ensure respect for their confidential information.

### **Recruitment Plan**

The importance of pre-testing, (Hurst et al., 2015; Pizarro-Ruiz et al., 2021) makes identifying the necessary participants for research accurate. I sent a letter to the superintendents of several schools for approval with a large school district in mind. I forwarded the letter to the teachers with a follow-up email to ensure clear communication with their consent. In the letter, information regarding the requirements and introduction to the study would help educators understand my intentions. To meet the minimum required participant pool, I started recruiting for my research by utilizing the permissions from the willing county elementary school districts and contacted the educators in special education for willingness to participate. Convenience sampling

was used because of familiarity with the geographic area, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stratton, 2021). A convenience sample in mind helps when meeting with teachers and utilizing time efficiently. Preference was given to the educators that respond first to gain the necessary participant pool of 10-15 participants. I attempted to ensure educators were selected from multiple schools within the district to reduce biases in reporting. Once the targeted range was achieved, I stopped sending requests. Privacy might cause some educators to worry, so utilizing pseudonyms eased identification concerns. In addition, having signed copies of consent forms ensures the participants understand their role in the study and agreed to participate voluntarily. Knowing they can opt out at any point ensured the safety and confidentiality of their participation.

### **Data Collection Plan**

To fulfill Liberty University and case study qualitative study requirements, having three data collection methods ensures best practices and generates high-quality information once data collection. Utilizing various collection methods help capture the essential information presented by the participants. The first approach involved scheduling and conducting individual interviews. Once the interview was completed and reviewed, the participants received the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) to complete within a week of receiving. If the deadline was missed, the educator was contacted via phone and email to obtain the information. After completing the interview and FFMQ, the participant was emailed the lesson plan reflection to fill out and return. The participants received followed up communication weekly until all submitted information confirmed for accuracy.

#### **Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #1)**

The primary data collection method involves conducting interviews with teachers in special education settings. Interviews will support the case study approach of understanding the experiences teachers in special education have in implementing mindfulness-based interventions. These interviews will lead to collaboration through methods of either face-to-face or, if the participant prefers, online via Microsoft Teams meetings. Each session recorded and transcribed for accuracy and reporting procedures. The length of these meetings will depend on responses from participants, but average interviews should be at most 60 minutes to complete.

These questions were selected with the intention of addressing the central research question and sub-questions. By inquiring about resources and training, the participants support the researcher in understanding how mindfulness-based interventions are utilized in special education transition settings. Selection ensures the study questions are answered and validity of the responses is achieved through the series of questions. Educators have time to reflect on experiences and how those interventions affect students and stakeholders. Multiple questions target the central research question and sub-questions leading to a depth of information and understanding achieved. Additionally, structuring specific interview questions ensures each participant receives consistent questioning during structured interviews.

Table 1

### ***Individual Interview Questions***

1. Please describe your educational background and experiences utilizing mindfulness-based interventions. CRQ
2. What training or learning experiences have you had implementing mindfulness-based interventions? CRQ

3. What activities do you utilize when providing mindfulness-based interventions to students? SQ1
4. What resources or training have you identified to gain information on mindfulness-based practices? SQ2
5. How have you incorporated mindfulness-based interventions into your special education classes? SQ1
6. In what academic classes have you attempted to implement mindfulness activities? SQ1
7. When are available times to implement mindfulness-based interventions during the school day? SQ2
8. Describe what advantages you have observed in implementing mindfulness-based interventions into instructional classes? SQ3
9. What would be a motivating factor for increasing your willingness to implement mindfulness more often in your everyday classes SQ3
10. Describe your classroom environment before and after implementing mindfulness-based interventions? SQ1
11. What could administrators do to support you in integrating mindfulness-based interventions? SQ3
12. What disabilities present the most challenges when conducting mindfulness-based interventions in classes? SQ2
13. What additional factors or opportunities do you see to implement mindfulness in special education classes? SQ3



14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with implementing mindfulness-based interventions in special education classes that we haven't discussed?

SQ2

The questions identified for use in interviews specifically address the perspectives teachers in special education transition settings have in implementing mindfulness-based interventions. Through these questions, educators have the ability to elaborate on their individual experiences in their classrooms. With a variety of special education services represented, each teacher had different ideas on how mindfulness helped students meet classroom expectations. Structured questions support shared experiences and learning experiences of mindfulness. This helps the researcher understand the background of education the teachers possessed. Next, questions explored times, classes, and methodology of implementing MBI. These questions help clarify specifically how classroom time is utilized to implement mindfulness interventions. After exploring classroom procedures, questions probe teachers to identify effects in classroom environment, stakeholders, and administrators have in selecting programming to support students. By selecting these 14 questions, teachers can provide dialogue that lead to deeper conversations regarding MBI, special education, and supporting teacher's needs.

***Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #1)***

I began by analyzing the interview data after I transcribed each interview. I will compare each interview to identify common themes or language utilized. Each discussion will be reviewed at least three to four times to determine themes and accurately ensure transcriptions. After the interview concluded, I typed out the transcription of the interviews and gave the participant a week to review and clarify answers. This allowed participants the opportunity to

ensure validity in their responses and address any answers they did not feel were discussed clearly. Through a coding method, patterns or trends will demonstrate how educators use mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition settings. Several stages outline the best methods of analyzing interview data (Burnard, 1991; Weston et al., 2001). These stages included taking notes, identifying general themes to bring awareness to the educator's experiences, generating headings, organizing categories and sub-categories, and reviewing types with the dissertation committee to ensure validity. To make the analysis consistent across the different methods of analyzing data, I will utilize NVivo to record and analyze the transcripts consistently. The NVivo program helped in identifying themes from the interviews and ensuring accurate responses to the interview questions.

***Reflection of Lesson Plans (Data Collection Approach #2)***

Another method of collecting data involves collecting information of mindfulness-based interventions utilized by teachers. The participating educators will provide approximately 5 – 7 examples where they utilized mindfulness-based interventions in their special education lessons. A sheet will be provided where teachers can electronically input examples of their utilization of mindfulness. The purpose for utilizing analysis of lesson plans for collecting data provides a two-way line of communication between participants and researchers and helps provide credibility to studies through triangulation methods (Carter et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020). Additionally, reflecting on lesson plans provides information such as: How was mindfulness utilized in your classroom, what challenges to implement, and how did students respond to the mindfulness-based intervention? Through analyzing multiple lessons from educators, the strengths and barriers associated with implementing mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition settings will be highlighted. Over the data collection period, this allows

teachers to express authentic experiences from implemented lessons to identify the true impact mindfulness played in the classroom-learning environment.

***Lesson Plan Reflection Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #2)***

After receiving the lesson plans, I will identify the periods lessons were conducted to identify specific times when mindfulness is more likely to be utilized in special education transition settings. My plan is to collect the lesson plan reflections within one week of contacting the teachers for information. The electronic data sheets will then be processed through NVivo to determine the utilization of mindfulness occurring during special education classes across the different classrooms. The purpose is to identify themes across the lesson plans. The data will then be uploaded into NVivo to help with the triangulation of qualitative data. From the lesson plans, I examine the type of activities and add that data into the information provided for the individual participants. Information provided included length of lesson, time completed, mindfulness activity, strengths, and weaknesses.

***Questionnaires (Data Collection Approach #3)***

Participating educators would complete the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), Baer et al., (2006), for additional data collection, recognizing mindfulness traits. People who display frequent mindful behaviors experience lower symptoms of anxiety, depression, and additionally related mental health issues (Carpenter et al., 2019; Charbonneau, 2019). Continuing, (Baer et al., 2006; Dariotis et al., 2017) mindfulness-based interventions could reduce signs of psychological distress and increase physical health and well-being. Mindfulness reveals individual experiences for each educator. Understanding the perspectives of educators should reflect how often they utilize mindfulness-based interventions. This survey would improve insight into what mindfulness skills are present in participating educators in special

education. Participants will receive the questionnaires via email and will have a week to complete the questionnaires. If participants do not complete within the time frame, I will call the participant and identify a time frame for them to complete the assessment. Responses can be received either via email or via delivered in-person if a participants wishes to submit materials in person.

***Questionnaire Questions (Data Collection Approach #3)***

These thirty-nine Likert-scale questions rating from one (1) (Never or very rarely true) to five (5) (Very often or always true) would empower educators to contribute through completion of the survey utilized in Baer et al. (2006) and Ohio State University (2021):

Table 2

1. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving. (OBS)
2. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings. (D).
3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions. (NJ-R)
4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them. (NR)
5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted. (AA-R)
6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.  
(OBS)
7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words. (D)
8. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted. (AA-R)
9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them. (NR)
10. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling. (NJ-R)
11. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions.

(OBS)

12. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking (D-R)

13. I am easily distracted. (AA-R)

14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.

(NJ-R)

15. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face. (OBS)

16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things. (D-R)

17. I make judgements about whether my thoughts are good or bad. (NJ-R)

18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present. (AA-R)

19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "Step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it. (NR)

20. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing.

(OBS)

21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting. (NR)

22. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words. (D-R)

23. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.

(AA-R)

24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after. (NR)

25. I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking. (NJ-R)

26. I notice the smells and aromas of things. (OBS)

27. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words. (D)

28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them. (AA-R)

29. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I am able just to notice them without reacting. (NR)
30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them. (NJ-R)
31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow. (OBS)
32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words. (D)
33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go. (NR)
34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing. (AA-R)
35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad depending what the thought or image is about. (NJ-R)
36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior. (OBS)
37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail. (D)
38. I find myself doing things without paying attention. (AA-R)
39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas. (NJ-R)

***Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #3)***

Through surveys, information will be utilized for participant selection and additional triangulation to understand how educators use mindfulness-based interventions. Educators were presented with the questions via Microsoft Forms submission. The educator will complete the assessment and submit it to me within one week of receiving the questionnaire. For these forms, I followed the scoring guidelines from the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. This broke the data into several sub-categories. If a participant scored above 3.0, it recognized a higher level of

mindfulness awareness. Once all forms are completed, the recorded responses will be compiled into a spreadsheet for coding purposes and loaded into NVivo.

### **Data Synthesis**

For the data synthesis component of my research, I plan to compare the various methods, identify patterns, and interpret that data can challenge researchers. Following a consistent coding system will ensure accurate reporting and increase the study's validity, (Rogers, 2018; Saldaña, 2013). Utilizing software would improve consistency in coding. At this time, I would consider using a program such as NVivo to take the three different data collection methods into a single set of information. This program will allow me to input data from the three collection methods and have one centralized location for processing information. Stored electronically will ensure that coding and analyzing data is accurate (Dhakal, 2022; Georgiou et al., 2021; Rogers, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness**

Recognizing that qualitative research is unique to the people participating, it is essential to maintain a high level of trustworthiness. In conducting this study, I hope to demonstrate a high level of dependability by maintaining transparent communication with the dissertation committee, IRB, and participants in the study. Trustworthiness is worth considering in research, (McSweeney, 2021; Stahl & King, 2020) because in qualitative studies, readers need to have confidence and trust in the data they can collect. Additional measures to ensure trustworthiness in this study include maintaining credibility, focusing on the ability to transfer the lessons learned to other contexts, dependability, confirmability of information through accurate data collection, and demonstrating ethical behavior in the assembly and treatment of people and communication throughout the study. This was achieved by confirming both pre- and post-data collection to ensure accurate reporting with confirmation checks to confirm directions were

clear. Information was reviewed by the participants to ensure accurate information was conveyed. Maintaining trustworthiness can be accomplished when data collection methods match the information reported through interviews and artifact collections.

### **Credibility**

Maintaining credibility throughout the study (Adler, 2022; Stahl & King, 2020), made possible by triangulation measures, could increase credibility in this study. Credibility is having the belief that the shared information from participants is accurate. Forms such as data triangulation can prove the information was accurately collected. Taking the information directly from the participants and checking responses helps ensure information provided was correct. Verifying they have the correct license and credentials also ensures correct information reporting and credibility from the targeted audience. Utilizing approved methods for case study research, (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fleming et al., 2021) also reinforces the credibility of my study.

### **Transferability**

The ability for other researchers to replicate findings is vital in conducting research. I can improve the transferability of my work by taking detailed notes throughout the process. The more information that can be shared, the higher the likelihood future researchers can utilize the information. For a skill such as mindfulness, understanding the procedures for implementation are critical because people respond to mindfulness-based interventions in a variety of ways, (Berdick, 2013; Dai et al., 2022; D'Alessandro et al., 2022; de Leeuw et al., 2022). This information can benefit stakeholders in making informed decisions regarding policies implemented in their respective districts.

### **Dependability**



Factors to maintain dependability (Johnson et al., 2020; Peels & Bouter, 2021), such as completing interviews before making assumptions of data, maintaining an appropriate sample size of participants, and utilizing approaches that have proved successful best practices for using a qualitative approach. Being dependable and completing the tasks is essential, with many other traits listed. I can demonstrate this throughout the dissertation process by maintaining appointments with educators and not wasting precious time. One way to ensure dependability involves triangulating the three data collection sources. Triangulation measures increases dependability in studies because it reduces the bias from the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peterson, 2019; Santos et al., 2020). In addition, dependability can be ensured through inquiry audits where the dissertation committee reviews the process and products of the research at Liberty University.

### **Confirmability**

One of the ways confirmability can maintain throughout this study is through replication. In addition to replicating studies, (Peels & Bouter, 2021; Stenfors et al., 2020) ways to improve confirmability, including reproductions, direct copies, and conceptual duplicates prove that information presented can confirm without a doubt. Increasing a study's ability to be replicated by having a data-analysis plan, (Epp & Otnes, 2021; Peels & Bouter, 2021) the confirmability of a study increases as other researchers can replicate similar studies. Involving more than one person helps maintain credibility and increases the ability for a study to be confirmed in separate trials (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peterson, 2019; Santos et al., 2020; Yadav, 2022). Following the procedures listed throughout this case study will ensure the confirmability of research data.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations benefit students, educators, and families in any study. For my research, the approach to support families will ensure the utmost care for their well-being. Students in special education settings are an underserved population and can face even more pressure in rural communities. By providing support for them, they gain a needed advocate and the opportunity to have their voices heard. Using pseudonyms ensures that any data collected from teachers will remain anonymous. Information regarding where the research occurs will remain anonymous to ensure no accidental damage happens to the participating district. Informed consent utilized throughout the study will allow participating educators to end participation at any point. Involvement in the dissertation research is voluntary. Any data collected will be stored on a USB hard drive that is password encrypted and maintained in a secured locked location. A personal laptop will be utilized to have exclusive access to keeping the data and records. It will remain in a securely locked gun safe that remains secured to the walls of my house. According to LU IRB guidelines, all collected data and resources will stay locked in a secure area for at least three years. No current anticipated risks currently identified to the participants for this research. However, if an unsuspected issue should arise, I would fully cooperate with the local school district, Liberty University, and the dissertation committee to correct any potential problems.

## Summary

This qualitative research study will highlight special education teachers' challenges and successes in implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their classes from a case study perspective. This approach is appropriate because the real experiences teachers face highlight their learned involvements. Utilizing interviews, questionnaires, and data collection sheets provides a means to triangulate information to support how mindfulness affects special education classrooms. Students in special education have to learn how to learn with the support of their individualized education plans and skills to address potential mental health concerns. A greater understanding of how special education services carry from home to school supports the need for these interventions in schools. Implementing mindfulness-based interventions in special education classes helps students, teachers, and other paraprofessionals in the room. In addition, transferring the skills to parents to practice at home could support any behavioral issues that happen at home. Through mindfulness-based interventions, the transition gap students in special education face from school to their chosen vocation reduces. By implementing mindfulness, students gain awareness of their actions and the environment. Triangulation of data from interviews, surveys, and document collections will provide consistent feedback on how mindfulness-based interventions support all people who educate children in the rural setting.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

Chapter 4 begins with a description of the participants selected for this study. The identities of the participants are protected with pseudonyms. The participants were identified from three counties on the east coast. All members provided special education instruction to students in K-6 elementary school settings. Each participant shared their experiences providing mindfulness-based interventions to students in their special education classroom setting. Direct quotes from the participants are used in this chapter to explore the research questions while highlighting themes. Results from three data collection methods, personal interviews, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ), and lesson plan reflections provide evidence of how teachers in special education utilize mindfulness-based interventions. For the FFMQ, scores at or above 3.0 demonstrated a higher level of mindfulness.

### **Participants**

A total of 10 K - 6 special education certified educators agreed to participate in this study. Over 18 schools and county-based education providers in Pennsylvania and Maryland were contacted for participation. Over six months, only representatives from three school districts agreed to participate in the study. The participant pool comprised of one Caucasian male and nine Caucasian females. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect the identities of the participants. The age of participants ranged between 20 and 70. These educators provide academic instruction to students with a wide range of special education needs.

**Marsha**

Marsha was the first participant willing to participate in this case study. She is a Caucasian female between 30 and 45 years old working at the largest school district of the participants. She achieved a 3.51 rating on the Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire with her highest scoring sub-category being Describing. When asked about experiences with mindfulness-based interventions, she responded: “Me personally, it's been minimal. Mindfulness is kind of a newer trending topic as far as what we have been utilizing within service and things. Many mindfulness-based interventions uses the social-emotional side of student support. I've been in on a couple of different in-services where they kind of talked to us all about how to set the tone for the lesson, get those kiddos that are just struggling with their emotions and keeping all that together.”

In reflecting on lesson plans, Marsha noted interventions provided students with opportunities to develop independent skills. Additionally, the lesson reflections required 15 minutes to complete. Focus emphasized developing positive leadership and was part of a school-wide initiative. Students developed coping skills and had chances to rehearse skills to gain repetitive practice. Visual aids such as a thermometer helped students visually see their emotions to help verbalize how they were feeling. A physical chart on a worksheet or on their desk as a display helped students physically see different levels of frustration and could point to how they were feeling to initiate conversation about how to improve their day. This supported the students' growth in recognizing their emotions and develop a language of self-advocating their needs based off how they are feeling in the moment.

**Madison**

Madison was the second participant to submit an agreement to participate form. She is a Caucasian female between 25 and 40 years old. She entered her 8<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and was beginning a new chapter in her professional career as a life skills educator. She completed the Five Factor Mindfulness Questionnaire and was able to score at a level of 3.35 with the highest sub-score being in the Observing category. While reflecting on her experience in the classroom utilizing mindfulness, Madison shared, “I feel like I've done a lot during my autistic support and emotional support sections of my career, I have worked with students in kindergarten through 6th grade who are on the autism spectrum, and all different various emotional support, diagnosis. Usually the kids that I see once or twice a week and we work on social skills, emotional regulation, just different things like that. I feel like that's where I use a lot of the mindfulness strategies with them to help them with, to learn coping strategies that they can use themselves so that they don't need to be pulled out of class or take as many breaks.”

Madison was able to complete lesson plan reflections as a contribution to the case study. These lessons lasted between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. Madison’s lessons utilized both individual and small group settings to implement interventions. One lesson in particular showed a forward-thinking perspective. She collaborated with a co-teacher to implement weekly peer support groups where mindfulness-based interventions were introduced. Having more than one teacher present allowed for more individualized attention to the students. Additionally, having more than one educator involved in the lesson allowed for higher levels of instruction. Teachers could identify potential struggle points for students and strategize how to make the process more user-friendly for the students involved. With Madison’s classroom being a special education setting, having additional special education teachers involved provide students with more support

people in the building to build positive relationships. The students completed activities such as sensory bottles and benefited from having lessons co-taught. Madison's lessons reflected the need for students to practice emotional regulation.

### **Laura**

Laura was the third of the participants involved in this case study. She had prior practicum and student-teaching experiences, but was entering the 2023 - 2024 school year with her first opportunity to independently lead a special education classroom. Laura is a Caucasian woman between 20 and 35 years old. She rated 3.02 on her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire with Describe being the highest rated sub-category. As she reflected on her experiences and how she was utilizing mindfulness-based interventions, Laura noted, "So these were videos that just allowed the students to get up out of their seats and move around and really just calm down and be aware of their surroundings. We also did yoga where the students would again get to get up and really worry about their breathing and fully relax. We also had these books called "A little spot of emotion" books. If the students were feeling a type of way, they were able to go over and they would voice what emotion they were feeling and then we would get that book and we would read how we can calm down from it or how we can control the emotion that they were feeling.

In reflecting on lesson plans, Laura provided information on several lessons. These ranged from as little as five minutes as an individual intervention to a whole class instruction covering 30 minutes. Some examples involved having students rehearsing skills such as positive affirmations where they think about their positive qualities and verbally express to the teacher their traits. Others involved reflecting on scenarios. Utilizing their senses, they identify personal and environmental cues to identify problems in the present moment. Gaining self-awareness,

these students learn to manage challenging behaviors with appropriate coping skills. These social stories helped students identify correct interactions between staff and peers without calling students out individually. Laura noted social stories could be tailored to specific behaviors observed by students in her classroom. Creating stories demonstrate a way for students to recognize positive and negative behaviors by a fictional character and learn new coping strategies. For example, a story could be constructed involving students not taking turns on playground equipment. The student could relate to the feelings a student might feel if they were skipped or pushed in line. They could process how someone else feels and gain empathy for the wronged student. In completing this, students do not feel called out for their own misbehavior and can identify positive ways to manage challenging situations. Further dialogue between the Laura and the student can access deeper connections to how they could handle stressful situation in future scenarios.

### **Charli**

Charli was the fourth identified participant in this case study. Charli had been in the classroom for over 36 years. She presented as a Caucasian woman between the ages of 55 – 70 years old. She completed her final year in the classroom during the 2022-2023 school year. On her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, Charli rated 3.02 on her assessment with Observing being the highest rated sub-category. While discussing her rationale for wanting to explore how mindfulness-based interventions support students with disabilities, she reported, “Yeah, definitely. I mean, one of the things you learn with kids is that, you have to just continue to keep looking for those things that are going reach each one. Moreover, I would say, since the pandemic, we have watched the kids struggle more and more emotionally. I think that has driven a lot of me looking into things like that. What else should I be doing? What I could I be doing?”



When completing her lesson plan reflection, Charli provided several activities that took around 20 minutes to complete per lesson. Students completed journals as part of the activity. As part of the journal entries, students paused shortly and focus on breathing. After taking several breaths, students identified how they were feeling with either emoji's or the written emotion. After completing the journal, students had an opportunity to share their entry with the teachers, teacher's aids, and peers. Journal prompts include activities a student did over the weekend, games they play with family members, favorite food, or describing a friend. These prompts helped Charli gain information about interests for the student and how to improve the relationship on a deeper level. Understanding each individual student can be beneficial in developing plans to address peer relationships and other classroom dynamic concerns. This helped in creating an understanding classroom environment. The discussions provided the teacher with feedback on what a student was emotionally bringing into the classroom. It also allowed for assurances and affirmations to help bring the students to a mental place where they could engage in the learning process. These lessons were completed as students entered the room and were part of the structured flow of the day. Students understood the expectations and were able to comply with the requests across various grade and ability levels in her special education classroom.

### **Lenny**

Lenny was the fifty participant to take part in this case study. He is a Caucasian male between the ages of 35 – 50 years old. He has maintained a role in special education for the past 14 school years. On his Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, Lenny rated 3.05 on the questionnaire with Describe being the highest rated sub-category. Lenny shared when providing mindfulness interventions to students, his experiences involved, “OK. Yeah, we, try to get our

more challenging students some of these interventions. Recently, whenever I switched into the emotional support side of things we have attempted using some different breathing techniques and trying to get kids re-centered and refocused when they become agitated. If they go from that annoyed to angry to the next level furious, we try to do some different skills within that, but as far as trainings, I have not received not a ton of experiences with using mindfulness.”

Lenny submitted lesson plans for reflection. Identified in his plans several activities were listed that were 30 minutes in duration. Interventions focused on de-escalating students that were emotionally frustrated or building positive mindfulness coping skills. Students were engaged in activities such as visualizations. Visualizations often were progressive exercises where students were guided to think of relaxing places and listening to sensory information to calm them down. An example would be visualizing a walk on a beach. Students would be prompted to think about the breeze in their face, the feeling of sand on their feet, and sounds they might hear. Progressively, through focused visualizations, breathing slows and heightened emotions are reduced. Students would reflect on times they experienced a frustrating event. They would process through deep breathing best ways to handle situations. In a safe, special education classroom, students could identify ways to manage problems before they reach a breaking point. Other activities included journaling that allowed students time to think about how they are feeling and physically put their thoughts down on paper. This helped with bridging academic content with mindfulness coping skills. By writing down information, students had a journal that could be processed and reflected on with the teacher to identify how they have made improvements in handling challenging situations at school.

**Darla**

Darla was the sixth educator to agree to participate in the study. She had special education experiences in both the elementary and junior/senior high school. Darla is a Caucasian woman between the ages of 30 and 45 years old. On her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, Darla scored a 3.0 on her assessment with Acting with Awareness and Non-Judging Items being the highest sub-categories. During her interview, she noted when using mindfulness to support elementary students, “Currently, that's what I said. A lot of what we are doing now is more into kind of just taking a moment and leave, especially with one student we have been using breathing activities. So if you can see her thoughts are disorganized, she is not regulated at all. I'm just having her take what we called “me time.” Just kind of stopping. Take some “me time” and then we'll practice some breathing activities with her.”

On her lesson plan review, Darla utilized several resources that ranged from brief 5-minute interventions to 15-minute reflections. In these activities, students were provided with different breaks. Students in Darla's classroom had lower level of functioning, which made redirecting back to classroom activities more challenging. Many students enjoyed the activities such as videos, dancing, and deep breathing. When the break ended, Darla reported challenges getting students re-focused on academic classes. One intervention that encouraged students to a deeper level of thinking involved gratitude journaling. Students in Darla's classroom are encouraged to reflect on something they are appreciative about. When students are frustrated, they sometimes take for granted the positive things they have in their lives. Overwhelmed by situations and emotions, they are trapped into a negative thinking cycle. With encouragement and journaling, students change their thought process onto the good things they can do and the shift encourages a more caring attitude in the classroom. Students needed a lot of additional support to complete the assignment because the abstract concept of gratitude was difficult for

them to understand. With additional prompting and support, students were able to complete the task and gained insight on how their interactions with other people can make them feel good as well.

### **Felicia**

Felicia, the seventh educator to participate, had experiences in both academic and mental health settings. She is a Caucasian woman between the ages of 45 and 60. Her background provided multiple experiences for learning mindfulness-based interventions, and how those applications support students in special education transition settings. Combining the two areas has been beneficial in creating a supportive classroom environment. Felicia said, “The most significant exposure I had was probably in the partial hospital program. We received a lot of training in cognitive therapy techniques, and then I watched the therapist interact with the kids. After observing these techniques, I used some of the techniques and implemented them in my classroom to help get the kids through their days. Therefore, I learned a lot of breathing techniques. Mostly involving some training in being aware and having mindfulness and mindful meditation. Using your body and your muscles to help get that awareness, like tensing each muscle and then, releasing that flexing and then, just seeing that stuff into play to help calm down kids to help get ready, get kids ready to learn. Seeing how effective it was in the classroom was so very beneficial.” In completing her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, her rating was 3.48 and rated high in the Acting with Awareness content area.

In completing her classroom reflections, Felicia identified lessons that were completed over a 30-minute period. The lessons engaged students individually and provided team-building activities to create a caring learning environment. Felicia integrated manipulatives such as Lego’s and technology into the lessons. Students completed activities together and provided

commentary on projects. Some activities required extra prompts for the students because the abstract concepts associated in mindfulness discussions such as anxiety and integrity were difficult to understand. Having hands-on manipulatives or technology to assist teachers like Felicia in implementing mindfulness, it can bridge learning gaps never before supported. Felicia possesses a sensory box that includes a variety of fidgets, Legos, sand, and putty. Some students even have the opportunity to use a weighted lap pad or chair band to fidget in their seat while working on academic tasks. Including physical sensory items provide an outlet for pent up energy required for sustained academic activity. Felicia found allowing students to use manipulatives encouraged fine motor development while helping maintain student focus in class. Additionally, having access to one-to-one iPad technology encourages students to use applications as Xello career readiness, YouTube Kids meditation programs, and Calm app, students can take a short break during stressful academic tasks or in between lessons.

### **Veronica**

Veronica, the eighth participant in the study, expressed a unique path towards entering the special education transition setting. She is a Caucasian woman between 35 and 50 years of age. She began her professional career in the elementary classroom. Those experiences led to an understanding that, “During that time, I taught regular education, but looking in a classroom today, I know that there is not just a fifth grade classroom or a fourth grade classroom within that room. You have kids that worry about where they are going tonight, if they are going to eat, or they cannot understand something. With those concerns, I decided to go back and get my Special Education Certification so I could help all of them. A position opened within our Special Education department and I was able switch over to the special education classroom.” Moving into the special education classroom felt like a natural calling. She recognized that providing

mindfulness-based interventions can occur seamlessly during the day to support students as needs arise. Veronica completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire and completed scores in the 2.82 range with the highest rated area being Non-Judgement Items.

In completing her lesson plan reflection, Veronica identified lessons that took approximately 15 minutes to complete. These lessons involved students recognizing the feelings they were feeling and using sign language, signal the emotion they were feeling. During morning meetings, students would be asked in circle time, “How are you feeling?” Each student would use sign language and verbalize how they were feeling. Veronica could use that interaction to reflect physically how a student feels, and the students became more animated as the year progressed. They learned feelings both positive and negative and incorporating sign language encouraged physical motion and mental reflection in the present moment. Students had to connect in their minds how they were feeling, and then physically sign the emotion. This helped connect students in the moment to how they were feeling. Additionally, deep breathing activities were utilized. In these lessons, students in the class were prompted to take a deep breath, hold it for a count, and then release. They did this several times, as they were getting ready to rotate during their stations time in class. This helped bring focus to the teacher and allow her to provide instructions for the next part of the lesson.

### **Gretchen**

Gretchen, the ninth educator to agree to participate, is a special education facilitator that had roots in the regular education setting before making the switch to special education transition setting. She is a Caucasian woman between 25 and 40 years of age. She has been in education for 4 years and made the switch to the special education setting this school year. Gretchen recognized her general education class also contained many students with disabilities, so her

motivation to change opinions of special education instruction inspired her switch. While Gretchen admitted a limited focus on mindfulness-based interventions in her schooling, she added, “So, to be honest, I don't really have that much background, but I definitely feel like colleges in the education realm should provide mindfulness experiences. Going over what it is, how to implement it. Just learning how to help children cope and regulate their feelings. Using stress reduction strategies in the classroom, whether that's genuine classroom special Ed, just across the board for all students, just to be able to help regulate their thoughts and emotions instead of being controlled by them. Those are types of things that I've learned since teaching, but I never learned any practices like that before becoming an educator.” Gretchen successfully completed her Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, scoring 3.23 as a composite score with Describe scored as the highest rated category.

Gretchen additionally completed lesson plan reflections. In these reflections, the range was 5 minutes through 15 minutes for mindfulness-based interventions. Unique to Gretchen’s classroom is the level of attentiveness she has in her students. Through general observations, she recognized when her students needed a break. Rather than taking rewards or issuing consequences, she utilized deep breathing as a way to bring the students back into the present moment. Another tangible method mindfulness was introduced in Gretchen’s classroom utilized exercises. Gretchen would call out different movement cues and students would count to five while completing the task. Incorporating movement took the students’ minds off the academic tasks and provided a break before re-engaging the class in academic tasks. Some examples would include physical movements such as push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, or body squats. Other movements included pretend jump rope, marching in place, or small head, waist, or arm circles. These exercises were incorporated as students were working on assignments in class.

Gretchen said at times, she would have the students put their pencils down, do a quick exercise, and then return to their assignments. This helped re-focus easily distracted students and provided a break for those that needed it. These activities showed how breathing and movement could be applied in brief settings to relieve pressure from students so they can engage their peers and education with a clear mind.

### **Olivia**

Olivia was the tenth and final participant to agree to consent to engage in these mindfulness-based interventions. Olivia is a Caucasian woman between the ages of 50 and 65. She shared experiences in both the elementary and junior/senior high school settings. When supporting students, Olivia shared the experience, “I’ve got one right now that gets very frustrated and cries because his level of frustration is just so low. He has had a lot of trauma. It is life lately, and we are just working with him to just try to focus. Do what you are needed to do. Calm down. Deep breath. I’ve had to send him out of the room to speak to (social worker) or (emotional support staff) just to get him to regroup. So he can come back to us ready to engage in learning.” She recognized that mindfulness-based interventions are needed to help students enter a mindset to successfully engage in the learning process. Olivia was able to complete the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, scoring 3.30 on her assessment with Describe being the highest rated sub-category.

In completing lesson plan reflections, Olivia identified lessons that were completed over a 30-minute period. Students were engaged in an application called Quaver. It is an application the school district purchased to support social-emotional learning for students. Students could do breathing exercises, “mindful journeys”, or emotional reflection activities to develop and encourage social-emotional skills. The lessons follow a script, and the students were familiar



with the program as the music department used the same application for music education specials class. Students could review scenarios and identify solutions. They had to think about how they were feeling and how others would respond based on the decisions they made. This supports higher-level thinking and rehearsing how to learn new skills and apply them to everyday situations. Since the lessons were group oriented, students had opportunities to collaborate and share ideas for the best way to implement mindfulness-based interventions.

Table 3

*Teacher Participants*

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Highest Degree Earned	Content Area	Grade Level
Marsha D-1	10	Masters	Special Education	K-5 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Madison E-2	08	Masters	Special Education/Early Childhood & Reading Specialist	Life Skills K-6
Laura V-3	01	Bachelor's Degree	Special Education / Early Childhood	5 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> Grade Learning Support
Charli H-4	36	Masters	Special Education	K-12
Lenny E-5	14	Masters	Elementary /Special Education	K-6
Darla U-6	15	Masters	Elementary/Special Education & Curriculum Instruction	K-12
Felicia V-7	08	Masters	Psychology &Special Education	K-12
Veronica Y-8	19	Masters	Elementary Education & Special Education	K-6
Gretchen E-9	04	Masters	Special Education	K-6
Olivia Y-10	30	Masters	Elementary Education & Special Education	4-12

## Results

This section is organized thematically based on findings to the four research questions. These research questions aimed to gain understanding of the experiences teachers in special education transition settings have in utilizing mindfulness-based interventions in their classrooms. The first sub question explores how teacher in special education incorporate mindfulness-based interventions into their classes. The second sub-question examines what benefits educators observe when implementing mindfulness-based interventions. The third and final sub-question reviewed how potential barriers educators observed when implementing mindfulness-based interventions.

Table 4

### *Themes and Subthemes*

Theme	Subtheme			
1 Mindfulness	1 Deep Breathing	2 Journaling	3 Sharing of Experiences	4 Progressive Muscle Exercises
2 Classroom Instruction Tools	1 Go Noodle	2 Zones of Regulation	3 Kids Yoga	4 Music
3 Reasons for Classroom Application	1 Rapport Building	2 Emotional Regulation	3 Classroom Energy	4 Attention to tasks
4 Classes to Implement	1 Academic Periods	2 Transitions between subjects	3 Recess/Lunch	4 Small groups
5 Classroom Environment	1 Before MBI	2 Post-MBI	3 Effects on Teachers and Staff	4 Effects on Students

6 Students with Disabilities Challenging Diagnoses	1 Oppositional Defiant Disorder	2 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	3 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	4 Autism Spectrum Disorders
7 Administrative Perspective	1 Understanding	2 Prioritizing Training	3 Knowing needs of the district	4 Collaboration with Peers

### **Mindfulness Interventions**

The term mindfulness interventions were applied loosely with the participants at the start of this data collection. The purpose of this was to understand how teachers utilize mindfulness-based interventions in their special education transition settings. When asked about learning about mindfulness-based interventions, Laura noted, “Well, I did have a psychology class where we talked about how important mindfulness is for students.” Several interventions were outlined in supporting student’s knowledge of mindfulness. Teachers were receptive to attempting to utilize mindfulness-based supports in their classrooms. While different approaches were mentioned throughout the interview process, several prominent themes were revealed. These seemed to improve student performance in the classroom. When questioned about specific methods mindfulness-based interventions were utilized, the following were several methods identified by the participants.

#### ***Deep Breathing***

The most common intervention teachers in special education transition settings utilized involved deep breathing. In one form or another, every teacher identified deep breathing as an intervention utilized in his or her classrooms. By focusing on taking breaths, the students were engaged in a purposeful intervention to redirect mental focus to the present moment. Students were encouraged to take a deep breath, hold it for a count, and then released. The rhythmic

pattern provided a level of control for the students and helped de-escalate feelings during highly intense moments. Gretchen noted in this intervention, “We practice that a couple times and I feel I can just see the stress just leave their bodies. They're more relaxed after we do a couple rounds of those deep breathing exercises.” Students were then asked to re-engage in an academic activity or other social-emotional lesson to achieve the goals written in a student’s individualized education plan (IEP).

### ***Journaling***

Another sub-theme identified by several educators involved journaling. Educators identified times during the day that students had opportunities to write their feelings. This strategy could be incorporated during class, as reported by Charli, “For one of my other groups, it was part of their journaling activity. One of the little guys, he would come in, he would open up his journal, and he would put a big smile with an X through it if he was having a bad day.” Encouraging writing provided students with a grounded approach to managing challenging emotions. Journaling requires students to mentally engage in reflecting on topics to them specifically. The examples of these prompts were often individualized based on the grade and cognitive functioning of the students in the classroom. They could be imaginative topics such as what super power would you like to possess, or goal driven such as what is your favorite class in school? Several processes in journaling support student well-being. First, they have to be able to think about the topic and how they would like to express themselves. Second, they need to have the fine motor skills to hold the paper and writing tool. Third, they have to be able to put their thoughts concisely on paper. Alternatively, a student could type responses on an electronic device such as an iPad for technology integration. Lastly, when the teacher prompts responses,

students have the ability to verbally share responses with the teacher and peers, encouraging class participation.

Students require the physical or technological capabilities to get their thoughts on paper or an electronic document. This two-factor method engages higher-level thinking and engages multiple regions of the brain. By engaging in these practices, students will gain a higher understanding of their emotions and the effect it has on both peers and educators. Having the ability to think about how they feel in the present moment allows opportunity to seek support when needed and recognize the cause of distractive or disruptive behaviors that might occur in the classroom.

### ***Sharing of Experiences***

The next sub-theme involves sharing experiences. These verbal opportunities could occur either with peers or as an individual one-on-one interaction with a teacher. These “Check-In” opportunities provide not only a safe place for students to share experiences from home that might cause emotional outbursts, but also time for teachers to process ways to manage difficult emotions. Felicia recognized interactions could support students in school when she stated, “As they begin to learn, if you wouldn’t like this being done to you, don’t do it to someone else.” Students develop empathy through understanding if their feelings get hurt, behaviors might cause other people to have feelings hurt as well. Having social stories proved students with examples of situations they might face during the day and encourage deeper reflection on how to safely manage emotions in the present moment. Students that engage in sharing experiences provide educators with a peek into the things students emotionally bring with them to school. Building familiarity with the teacher allows students to feel safe to express themselves in a non-judgmental setting that does not take away from instructional time. This intervention usually was

reported to be utilized during a homeroom period when students were first arriving to campus. These check-in opportunities provide a perfect opportunity for teachers to address potentially upsetting issues with students before the day gets started. If they appear visibly upset, the teacher can address concerns and provide meaningful feedback for the student. The student can use the time to write their feelings on paper, which helps when face-to-face conversations about sensitive topics might be challenging to address in a whole-class scenario. Students can confidentially share information they want the teacher to know without broadcasting it to the entire class. In doing so, the student's emotional well-being improves and risk of challenging behaviors diminishes.

### ***Progressive Muscle Exercises***

The final mindfulness intervention identified by the teachers in special education transition settings involved progressive muscle relaxation. This intervention involves students following a script and completing a series of tensing and relaxing muscles up and down their bodies. Felicia commented, "Using your body and your muscles to help get that awareness, like tensing each muscle and then, releasing that flexing and then, just seeing that stuff into play to help calm down kids to help get ready, get kids ready to learn." Typically, this is done in a student's seat, but could be done in a resource room or lying on the floor. The point of emphasis is to pay attention to how a student's body feels during the tensing and relaxing commands. Through the sequence of exercises, students can identify areas of their body where they feel problems or tension. Teachers such as Darla reflected on progressive muscle exercises learned through professional development training, "We had the training with SAP last week through the SAP Networking training system, where I don't remember his last name, Peter, had gone through and we had gone over different exercises of mindfulness, what that looked like, the benefits, and

how adult behavior impacts student behavior.” The trainer started at the toes, moving to the calves, thighs, stomach, shoulders, arms, and neck. Breathing prompts were provided while we tensed and relaxed the muscles paying attention to our individual bodies. While this was happening, the venue was silent as professionals practiced this instruction. It carried over into the classroom because students connected with the muscle prompts and listening to their bodies. It helped in creating a calming classroom where focus could be turned to the academic tasks of the day. With that understanding, teachers can then begin to address physiological stressors that lead to problematic behaviors in class.

### **Classroom Instruction Tools**

This next section involves the tools or means special education teachers to deliver mindfulness-based interventions to students. One challenge teachers stated was identifying resources that would be beneficial for students. Thanks to word of mouth between colleagues, several programs showed the potential for student social-emotional growth. These interventions could be provided as individual, small group or whole class interventions. These approaches’ versatility allows teachers to tailor the delivery of services to students.

### ***Go Noodle***

Go Noodle is a website that provides movement and mindfulness activities for students or classes to participate. The offering is a free website that provides a variety of games, skills, and videos to gain mindfulness knowledge. Teachers reported this site helps as a whole group activity when they observe students becoming restless. Charli reported, “The kids love that, and they would just have activities on teaching kids how to breathe and what to look for in your environment and how to really just try and regulate yourself.” These breaks allow students to move, stretch, and interact with peers. This resource can be beneficial for families because they



can access these resources at home and students can rehearse these skills from the privacy of their own homes. On the site, different activities such as “Which is More Like You” incorporate decision-making and movement. Students are shown an image such as, “Are you more like a rabbit or a duck?” Students then move to one side of the room or the other. The teacher can pause the video and ask probing questions to see why choices were selected. These brief interactions break up academic tasks and provide movement for hyperactive students. They also have opportunities to practice appropriate social skills and peer interactions. This helps improve student engagement and good decision making in a safe and fun way.

### ***Zones of Regulation***

Zones of Regulation is a program purchased by a school district for teachers in special education transition settings to use. This curriculum supported teachers in special education transition settings by providing interactive lessons to develop mindfulness and age-appropriate coping skills. Emotions are broken down into four categories according to Madison, “Green Zone is when you’re like happy/calm, Yellow Zone is when you’re frustrated/anxious, Blue Zone is when you’re feeling sad/down/sick/tired, and Red Zone is when you have an extremely heightened awareness and you’re angry/upset.” Each of the zones list multiple feelings a student could experience. A teacher could use for example the “Green” zone, and talk about feelings in that area such as calm, relaxed, or grateful. Students might not know what these words mean, which would necessitate the teacher providing cues or examples to help students learn the definition. Each picture has the word and an image to help students if they are unsure of a term. Formatting in this manner allows teachers to use brief interventions or a whole group setting. This helps students learn red does not necessarily mean “bad” and help overcome negative connotations with intense feelings. Lessons could be tailored to small groups or individual

student needs. Madison continued, “The first thing that I do when I teach kids with Zones of Regulation is what the four colored zones are, the different emotions that correspond with them, and what coping strategies they can use to help them get back to the Green Zone.” Part of the program involves students learning skills they can practice on their own such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation. Another component assists students in developing self-advocacy skills. Through addressing mindfulness in Zones of Regulation, students become more relaxed and willing to re-engage in the academic classroom instruction.

### ***Kids Yoga***

Kid’s yoga was an intervention that utilized both teacher-prompted exercises and videos to follow on websites such as YouTube. Gretchen had success utilizing this intervention and commented, “It’s called Cosmic Kids Yoga, it’s a yoga instructor who takes these students on a journey, and the journey could be like Minecraft. It could be dinosaurs. It could be robots. There is a variety of different avenues that she takes them on, and it is a story. And as she’s telling the story, they’re doing the yoga poses with her as the story continues.” These activities can be selected based on student interests. Students that follow along with the activities can gain grounding and redirect away from emotionally triggering stimuli. In the classroom, students can share experiences and develop positive peer relationships.

### ***Music***

A final instructional tool that educators found helpful involved playing music. Having calming sounds played while students worked helped in developing a calm classroom atmosphere. Students could move to the music if they needed a physical break, or could sit calmly and focus on the sounds being played. This intervention appeared to have mixed results. Some students enjoyed the background music, while others disliked the softer music selections and reported feeling agitated. Olivia noted, “They say that stresses them out more and they don’t

really like it. It does provide a calmer environment, but I think that sometimes they're so used to the chaos that they're not used to calming things.”

### **Reasons for Classroom Application**

One theme that educators consistently identified was rationale for how mindfulness-based interventions supported their classroom needs. Outlined in this section includes ways educators utilized mindfulness-based interventions to create a safe learning environment. Some reports indicated the use of mindfulness-based interventions to manage challenging behaviors. Some teachers in special education transition settings even identified applications that improve ability to complete classroom assignments. All applications involve developing a student's ability to self-regulate challenging emotions and focusing on academic-related tasks for grade completion.

### ***Rapport Building***

The first application identified by several educators involves rapport building. Whether the interactions are teacher-student, student-student, or student-other school personnel, using mindfulness-based interventions allows students to develop deeper relationships. Veronica said mindfulness-based interventions helped in building a consistent language in her classroom, “I think the main advantage is it really bonds your class. It lets them express themselves, but knowing how it might affect others and what we can do.” During activities, students have opportunities to share experiences and things they are feeling. Listening to classmates share their feelings or things happening encourages peers to provide positive feedback if a student experiences a sad feeling for example. Veronica identified songs and dance as a way to create common experiences for the students that encourages participation and rapport. Each student has a unique personality and during those song or dance breaks can allow students to affirm positive feelings about themselves and their classmates. These connections allow for the teachers and

students to learn more about each other on a deeper level. Students can interact with each other and following a consistent routine builds familiarity in the classroom. Engaging in activities also provides shared experiences teachers can reflect on with students when they are reaching a breaking point in their academic or behavior.

### ***Emotional Regulation***

A second reason for applying mindfulness-based interventions into special education transition settings is emotional regulation. Students experience high levels of frustration as they work toward learning on grade level. One method teachers facilitate emotional regulation involves identifying levels of stress response. Each person responds to stress differently, and discussing how stress makes students feel, can help prevent full escalation of problems. Marsha learned, “Many mindfulness-based interventions uses the social-emotional side of student support. I’ve been in on a couple of different in-services where they kind of talked to us all about how to set the tone for the lesson, get those kiddos that are just struggling with their emotions and keeping all that together.” When frustrations build, students need to access skills to regulate their emotions appropriately. Teachers can help reframe problems when students are feeling emotionally triggered. This helps students learn perspectives and encourages empathy development. In some cases, the student performs an activity independently in the back of the room. Other times, if the task or behaviors are spread among several students, a class break could be required to help ground and refocus the students’ attention. Even sensory regulatory practices such as a snack, walk, or fidget to manipulate helps manage heightened emotions. Through the use of mindfulness, students gain the skills to manage stress and other challenging emotions in school or in the workplace.

### *Classroom Energy*

Another component teachers reflected on for applying mindfulness-based interventions in their classes involved the classroom energy. Lenny acknowledged an initiative to support students, “We can use different things up there. We have bean bag chairs and other manipulatives now where we have like an area that’s more of a sensory area where they can kind of like relax and calm down and decompress a little bit.” Several teachers identified students experience high levels of trauma and abuse. When their guard is up, developing relationships and engaging in the learning process becomes more challenging. Mindfulness-based interventions help defuse tension present in the room. With addressing environmental stimuli, students in special education can feel better about themselves and engage in the learning process. For teachers to specifically address classroom energy, they can examine the physical layout of the classroom space, how the students complete work, and the interactions between students and staff. Some students enjoy having a chance to take their shoes off at their desk while completing assignments. Teachers reported feeling the room and recognizing when students were feeling disconnected. Darla found in her classroom, “So if we’re having bad days, we can tell. Sometimes these students, and that is the importance of knowing them, coming in with a bad mood. You can tell what kind of day you’re going to have, and we might need to be more responsive.” By completing an activity, some teachers reported similar findings that the mood of students change and their ability to maintain a safe, cooperative learning environment emerges. Creating the safe environment encourages communication in the classroom, which leads to better academic output. Students feel more connected and will want to attend school more often because of addressing classroom energy.

### ***Attention to Tasks***

The last rationale for mindfulness-based intervention applications involves attention to tasks. Teachers in special education transition settings reported challenges redirecting problematic behaviors. In order to maintain attention to IEP goals or academic tasks requires the ability to stay focused on tasks. Simple prompts such as asking students to repeat instructions can help ensure students are focused on the directions and understand instructions. Teachers reported when implementing mindfulness-based interventions, students are emotionally calmer and can begin to focus more on higher-level tasks. Charli recognized through self-awareness, “I think just teaching kids to just try and be a little bit aware of your surroundings, where you were fitting in class. Are you comfortable in your seat? Just that those little things can make a huge difference in whether or not they’re ready to learn, and whether or not they’re going to absorb what you’re trying to teach them.” Recognizing students are beginning to lose focus, teachers could prompt students to complete a movement exercise at their seat, a quick breathing exercise with pencils down, or class cheer/chant to bring attention back to the current task. This helps students re-engage on their own without needing a teacher to hover near their desk. By providing opportunities for students to improve time on task, they develop stronger positive feelings about school and their ability to become a life-long learner.

### **Classes to Implement**

While the previous section discussed specific interventions teachers utilized, the next section discusses times were teachers could utilize mindfulness-based interventions. Teachers mentioned a variety of times during their interviews. Some interventions could be held during instructional periods. Other times support student needs during other classes or as a bridge between academic periods. Teachers recognized time was not specifically dedicated to

mindfulness-based interventions due to restraints put in place by administrators. For some teachers that did not have regular academic periods, they identified times during their school day interacting with students that were conducive in implementing mindfulness-based interventions.

### ***Academic Periods***

The period teachers recognized most frequently involved academic classes. Typically, teachers found times during reading and math most needed mindfulness redirections. Laura utilized her English class to incorporate mindfulness into her lesson, “We had the students do a mindfulness poem where they got to choose a color around the room and explain what reminded them of that color or what they felt whenever they see that color.” The academic rigor in those specific classes is higher and teachers reported higher levels of frustration during those times. When frustration was observed, teachers would either prompt students to finish a section of work, or if frustration was high enough, stop the activity and complete a mindfulness-based activity to lower frustration. Once frustration levels were lowered, the student would be prompted to return to the academic task.

### ***Transitions between Subjects***

Some teachers have the same students in special education transition settings for multiple subjects. When moving from one subject to another, a possible time to interject mindfulness-based interventions occurs between subjects. This is a natural place where educators can help prepare students for the transition. Marsha described that time as additional rapport building with students, “It’s just talking to them for the first 5 minutes. How was your day? How was your weekend? Tell me something that you did, and if they don’t feel like sharing, that is up to them as well.” Some examples include music to signify the end of a course or the beginning of the next subject. As one subject ends, having a musical cue could help students naturally recognize

the transition is coming up. Additionally, breathing exercises with a verbal prompt of the time remaining on a task could support students that struggle with transitions. Having a 5-minute reminder, 2-minute reminder, and transition prompt allows students to know the next academic period is beginning. The auditory or movement cue provide additional feedback for students to trigger a change is happening. This helps with managing challenging behaviors because most students will understand the cues. Teachers will not have to confront students not on task because they will have multiple prompts to address concerns. Classroom dynamics improve as students become used to the transition prompts, they will be able to follow the established routine with higher consistency and familiarity.

### ***Recess/Lunch***

One of the most challenging times for students reported by teachers involves the transition returning from lunch or recess. Teachers could use box-breathing techniques to calm students before a transition to the cafeteria or playground. Students will breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, breath out for four seconds, and hold for four seconds. If they successfully complete three or four quiet breaths, the teacher could redirect the students to line up for lunch or recess. Charli acknowledged, “You have to do it when you’re coming back from a break. You know, if they’re down at the bathroom, or they’re coming back from lunch, particularly if they’re coming in from recess, you know they’re wired.” These times are typically unstructured times for students. Attempting to return to the structure of the academic setting can be challenging for students in special education. To make the transition more challenging, conflicts with peers stemming from lunch activities or recess games can lead to increased frustration in students. Upon returning to the classroom, having students sit and repeat a box breathing activity or journal reflection can bring focus back to the classroom. Teachers could incorporate music while



students work or use the quiet time to help students with the transition from unstructured to structured academic tasks. Teachers reported that by incorporating mindfulness-based interventions, tension from the stressful activities is lessened and students are more willing to re-engage in the structured parts of their school day.

### ***Small Groups***

A final time teachers reported mindfulness-based interventions working involves during a small group time. Within the academic portions of classes, students have times where they work in small groups with the teacher or teacher's aide. Starting small groups with a brief discussion of how their day is going can help students improve social skills. Listening to peers and providing positive feedback with another adult present can lead to better interpersonal skills. Allowing students to process their feelings in the here-and-now can prevent frustrations from building during the smaller session. In special education settings, this can be done since class sizes and groups are often smaller than general education settings. In these instances, redirecting to deep breathing or muscle relaxation helps students work through challenging problems in the classroom. Veronica noted in her class, circle time allows interactions with students, "So, if someone was to say they are feeling sad or they're feeling mad, my next question is what's making you feel sad? What's making you feel mad? So they're hearing it constantly asking, you know, what can we do to help or what's making you feel this way so that they know." These interventions additionally help provide cues for students to interact appropriately with each other. During small groups, there is a higher chance for students to interact. Bonds between students can strengthen as they collaborate in mindfulness interventions.

## **Classroom Environment**

The following section describes the effects mindfulness-based interventions had on the classroom environment. Being that the students in special education received their academic instruction from an in-person brick and mortar setting, it was noted changes occurred in this setting. Teachers attempt to create a safe, collaborative environment where students feel safe. Considering the classroom environment allows students to feel respected and more willing to engage in the learning process. Teachers reported differences in the learning environment as interventions were used with students.

### ***Before MBI***

When asked about the learning environment before implementing mindfulness-based interventions, teachers had common responses. The environment was noisier, more chaotic, and challenging. Felicia described it as, “Tension. Anxious filled. Just chaotic, and that would be before.” Students are often out of their seats and discussing off-topic things. Interactions are more intense, and conflicts arise. Attempts to redirect behavior often go unnoticed by students. Heightened distractions also happened during changes in routine or staff. Before implementing MBI, the students might have frustrations from another class, home, or with peers that affect their ability to learn before ever setting foot in the classroom. Without addressing underlying issues, students may take their frustrations out on teachers or classmates. This hostility leads to a classroom environment where students cannot do their best. Teachers consistently recognized breaks were needed. Even as teachers discussed the room, the tone was heightened with more frustration in tone.

### ***Post-MBI***

In discussing the environment after implementing mindfulness-based interventions, a completely different setting was described. The tone from teachers was calm, and the mental picture was happier. Students were more attentive and able to process directions. It became easier to get back on track with the next academic activity. Felicia added, “They’re calmer, they’re more relaxed, it’s quieter, it’s just it’s like the air is lifted, and it’s just a totally different environment.” Students were not making inappropriate comments. Peer-to-peer interactions improved as well. This is a result of students becoming more aware of not only how they are feeling, but also how their interactions contribute to the positive classroom environment. The reflection happens during breathing or meditation exercises utilized in a MBI. This is in part to becoming more aware of how their interactions affects others. Olivia recognized, “You do it now because I said they need that kind of support now. That’s the biggest thing that they have.” As a result, a more compassionate learning environment is created and teachers noted it was easier to engage in school tasks. With increased awareness from MBI, students have higher self-awareness because of breathing exercises and can begin focusing on the academic tasks in the classroom.

### ***Effects on Teachers and Staff***

For mindfulness-based interventions to maximize effectiveness, teachers often have to model activities for students. When participating in mindfulness-based interventions, teachers recognize their own emotions are regulated. If teachers and classroom staff participate in breathing exercises or meditation exercises, they are re-centering themselves as well. Shifting the mindset to their own emotions, they can better support students that have higher emotional needs. If staff fail to engage in the process, they could allow the frustrations of life to overwhelm

them and experience challenges supporting students in special education transition settings. By knowing how they are feeling, they can implement MBI strategies more efficiently to students by reflecting on the needs of students. Whether it is breathing exercises, movement exercises, or a worksheet/journal prompt, multiple methods could be utilized to meet student needs. Behaviors or interactions that lead to frustration or burnout are reduced. Additionally, the momentary pause in instruction allows teachers time to reflect on the needs of their students. With teachers like Veronica, having multiple support staff in the room learn to recognize, “Ohh OK, so we need to step back and think about that, and I think that that’s important. Is that what you mean? How are they interacting with the kids and modeling our behaviors.” By slowing down and reflecting on the environment, they can identify additional supports or resources to get students back into a mindset where learning can occur.

### ***Effects on Students***

Specifically for students, the most interventions had a resounding positive effect. Teachers noted when students were willing to participate in mindfulness-based interventions, they experienced less aggressive behaviors and spent more time on task. Madison discussed, “You see a lot better problem solving between the students, less tattling to the teachers. They were able to solve some of those smaller problems on their own because they have been given the conflict resolution skills. They don’t get mad as quickly.” Due to levels of frustration, some students were reluctant to engage in the activities. With engaging in the here-and-now due to MBI, students gain control over their emotions. This helps students participate in class activities with positive behaviors. As a result, academic performance improves because students feel better about themselves and contribute to the class activities purposefully. With encouragement, students were able to engage in the process. After participating in an activity, students

experienced more grounding. This led to increased awareness in their actions and feelings of people in the classroom.

### **Students with Disabilities Challenging Diagnoses**

While reflecting on their experiences, some diagnoses pose more challenges than others in implementing mindfulness-based interventions. Teachers of students with disabilities have a good understanding of the different personalities and diagnoses that make up the student population. By understanding the needs of a student based on diagnosis needs, identifying the best interventions to meet students' needs can be achieved. Ability levels of students is another factor that contributes to the diagnoses. Students with disabilities may have additional challenges processing interventions and participating in certain activities. By highlighting several of the more challenging diagnoses, educators can better understand how to implement mindfulness-based interventions with more effectiveness.

### ***Oppositional Defiant Disorder***

The diagnosis most often referenced during interviews was oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). In working with students with ODD, teachers identified several common challenges. For starters, students may refuse to participate in mindfulness-based interventions. Darla commented, "So whether that's the emotions of themselves, whether that's emotions of others, so they don't have the social awareness that maybe somebody else needs a break or somebody else needs to take a breath." Even if the activity is engaging and "fun", students may challenge the directive to control power. This challenge is met by having peers engage in the activity and enjoying the benefits of the activity. Teachers could make the request more personal, rather than calling out the student and escalating behaviors. Asking, "Do you need to move to another space to participate in the activity?" can help students feel control over the activity in class and encourage

them to participate. This strategy would support students during academic tasks as well. Engaging with MBI can allow students to choose which activity they do for their break and encourage independence. Additionally, supporting students with ODD can be challenging because they struggle with peer relationships. Engaging students in mindfulness-based interventions can provide opportunities for students to strengthen relationships with peers, staff, and community members and gain grounding principles to support all students in a classroom. Olivia recognized this importance because, “Because I’ve made a change to make it better. He is not changing my behavior, and I think my behavior and interactions as changed him. And things are going smoother, but it was me that had to change.” Providing choices and opportunities for independent decision making encourage self-development and supports students with ODD in staying calm, which leads to improving peer relationships.

### ***Attention Deficient/Hyperactivity Disorder***

The second most identified disorder involves students with attention deficit disorder (ADD) for inattentive students or attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) for more overactive students. Lenny noted in interacting with students, “The students at the elementary level have a really hard time with the self-discipline and self-regulation and making sure. They can go from calm and understanding, and then all of a sudden totally triggered by the flip of a switch. During some meltdowns, desks are being flipped, or students are using bad language or making people uncomfortable.” In both cases, students with ADD/ADHD struggle with maintaining focus on tasks. Students can be supported with MBI by having shorter, frequent breaks between academic tasks. Breaking classes into chunks could reduce behavior outbursts and increase time on tasks. Teachers could check-in with verbal prompts to encourage students to engage in MBI or academic tasks, which would improve behavior and academic performance.

Mindfulness-based interventions can support these specific students by rehearsing focus on breathing or muscle relaxation. With ongoing practice, students can rehearse skills and lengthen the amount of time focused on the task. This directly relates to students recognizing how they feel and developing the skills to independently regulate their behavior.

### ***Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder***

With the recent COVID-19 in memory, teachers in elementary special education settings recognized the levels of stress and trauma students face. Olivia acknowledged this change in students, “Yes, I’ve not seen this much trauma, so much trauma this year. Traumas. It is the right word to describe students. In addition, in 30 years, I have not seen this. Not this many. You would get one occasionally more than one. I’ve got four, maybe five.” MBI provide an outlet for students to work through trauma. Teachers providing opportunities to complete meditation breaks can release stress students are experiencing in the classroom. Providing opportunities for interaction can encourage a safe classroom environment. Through virtual learning, teachers had a unique opportunity to see the living conditions in which their students attempted to learn. All schools participating in this research receive low-income funding. Teachers recognize that students now are entering school with higher experiences with trauma. Understanding this fact, implementing MBI in class can help students process their emotions and recognize where negative feelings are coming from. Students gain insight on where negative feelings come from, and how to manage it appropriately. Charli discussed boundaries between home and school and witnessing home life from students, “Boundaries were completely broken. I mean the boundaries between home and school were just snapped and you know these kids just did not know how to process that. We as adults struggled to process that. So how did you expect a 5, 6, 7, or 8 year-old to understand the boundaries?” Addressing trauma through mindfulness-based interventions

provides students with disabilities a positive outlet for managing strong emotions. Educators recognize utilizing mindfulness-based interventions allows students to work through trauma and become more willing to engage in the learning process.

### ***Autism Spectrum Disorders***

While documented as the last disability, teachers consistently identified Autism Spectrum Disorders as one of the most challenging diagnoses to support students with disabilities. Some students are non-verbal, which makes communicating and self-advocating more challenging. Other teachers such as Charli commented, “I would have to say the children with autism, because they’re coming with, you know, a lot of different issues there. And when they come into the classroom, there are no two kids that are the same with autism, so you’re not sure what their level of awareness is of their surroundings.” Teachers that provide time for MBI empower students with ASD reflection time to manage challenging emotions. The break from academic tasks releases stress from classwork, while engaging the student with a favorable activity. For non-verbal students, these breaks are even more important because they struggle with expressing their needs to caring adults. Working with students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) were reported as having difficulties recognizing interpersonal skills such as appropriate space, appropriate conversation skills, and appropriate eye contact. Teachers address these shortcomings by using MBI as a social tool to engage students with peers and improve social interactions. Supporting students through mindfulness-based interventions provided another outlet for developing positive peer relationships and supportive classroom environment.

### **Administrative Perspective**

It is recognized that no programming can successfully be utilized if it is not backed by administrative support. Administrators set schedules, make policies and create the mission and



vision for schools to follow. Through interactions with students and staff, they can gain insights into the challenges faced in their districts. Administrators have the ability to provide teachers with training and resources they can take back to their classrooms. This can lead to new ways to provide students with skills to be productive life-long learners. Skills such as mindfulness-based interventions can support students with disabilities not only when they are in school, but also when they enter the workforce in their communities. These skills bridge an important gap in producing quality citizens.

### ***Understanding***

The most often comment made by teachers during interviews involved administrative understanding of mindfulness. It was recognized that some administrators might not come from a special education background. Charli noted, “I don’t know with the administration that I currently have. I know the principal understands mindfulness, but I do not know how much he understands how it fits in a classroom setting. But do you understand how it transfers down to children and a classroom setting and not just two minutes here, two minutes there.” Therefore, they may not be aware of interventions such as mindfulness that could support both educators and students. Having awareness in how mindfulness help maintain positive mental health for students and staff could lead to development of meaningful training. Teachers in special education transition settings would help their case by providing evidence of the emotional support need for MBI. Justifying the need for programming could lead administrators into exploring professional development opportunities for staff. If administrators do not have a background with mindfulness, they might not have a true understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, it is important for them to be visible with the students so they see how instruction can be disrupted when students exhibit problematic behaviors or are working

through trauma. Encouraging administrators to learn about MBI can have a direct impact on implementation and student outcomes. With many administrators setting schedules for teachers, having an understanding of MBI can lead to developing consistent times for teachers to encourage MBI and social-emotional skills development. Taking time to address these concerns improves long-term student academic and personal growth.

### ***Prioritizing Training***

For educators that have an interest in learning more about mindfulness-based interventions, administrators can support successful implementation of mindfulness through training opportunities. Some training could be coordinated with an Intermediate Unit. Other opportunities could happen during shared planning times or conversations between teachers. Lenny recommended, “Our administrators are supportive of helping with the kids and making sure that we are student centered and doing what’s best for the kids. They are willing to get us to professional development that we need. But, I think from that end it is just trying to find the right trainings and the right personnel to deliver the trainings I think would be pretty beneficial for the mental health of employees coming from the administration.” Teachers recognized administrators need to take the lead in this area because during in-service days, they are often pulled into sessions that do not support their professional growth. Administrators with an understanding of MBI could incorporate mindfulness-skills training during professional development for all staff. These skills would be more valuable than typical offerings that educators feel are repetitive or not applicable to their special education transition classrooms. At a minimum, they could encourage teachers to explore interventions that promote social-emotional learning. Teachers would feel more comfortable utilizing mindfulness-based interventions in their special education classes by participating in local offerings. MBI presents

as a newer topic for many staff members. Having exposure to a unique intervention that addresses classroom management enhancement by using interventions in class empowers teachers to utilize MBI more often and that directly relates to student performance in class.

### ***Knowing Needs of the District***

Administrators must possess the knowledge of district needs to support students according to teacher's interviews. Administrators can support teachers in implementing mindfulness-based interventions by recognizing the needs of the district. Having conversations with teachers consistently help administrators understand the student dynamics and needs teachers have to support students with disabilities. Administrators have the unique ability of directing programming for the districts they serve. It is easy for administrators to hide behind the central administration doors and ignore the students and staff. Opening lines of communication by being present in classrooms can prove valuable resources when understanding the needs of vested parties and creating a school where students feel valued and safe. Veronica maintained the sentiment, "I think it's important that it's not just my classroom that works on it, but it's school-wide and like I said, if we had a common language throughout the school, I think that would benefit everybody tremendously." Marsha said, "I feel like to upper administration, I'm talking like Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, need to realize that these are still children. They are babies. They need time to, you know, come into these emotions and things, and I feel like some of them are far removed from being in a classroom." This could be achieved by being present in the school. Some teachers expressed frustrations in administrators that worked exclusively in the central administration office. They noted it is hard to get their opinions on how to support students when they do not have any observations or data. Working with teachers and

listening to their concerns can lead to collaboration on how to implement mindfulness-based interventions in elementary special education transition settings efficiently.

### ***Collaboration with Peers***

A final component of administrative support that could benefit implementing mindfulness in elementary special education settings involves collaboration with peers. Often, teachers reported having limited time in the day to meet. Felicia recognized across the district, “I think just introduce it to the entire staff. I think allowing some trainings or some more exposure to it and introducing it to the staff and allowing it to be utilized and occur in the classroom. I know that the regular Ed teachers are under so much pressure to get certain things done in a certain amount of time and then when behaviors start, they panic and start to sweat because I do not have time for this. I feel like if we could maybe change the mindset of how we go about handling that pressure, I think that would be beneficial.” Developing things such as shared planning times, or in-service time to meet as a department could help teachers. Allowing peers to share information regarding what works and what does not can help address specific needs within a school district. Administrators could facilitate this task by providing time during in-service days for pod-level planning or common prep times for grade levels. Having a consistent time for planning would allow teachers to meet and reflect on best practices for supporting students. If a particular mindfulness intervention works with one class, it could be shared so more teachers could use it as well. Veronica shared, “I have to tell you that my colleagues are amazing, and I would say that they are there for me. When I hear they have resources, I can go to them for resources, and I have. One that’s in my building in particular is helpful, and she was the one that helped me start up the program.” This collaboration time could also help make teachers in special education settings feel more connected to the districts they serve.

## **Outlier Data and Findings**

During interviews, a single outlier developed after talking with all participants. In this section, reflection on a key outlier will highlight a separation in the data. When interventions for mindfulness-based interventions successfully integrated, teachers commented on how creative talents could intertwine with interventions to help ground students. One particular area appeared to have an unfavorable effect on the class. It is beneficial to understand this outlier as a caution when providing mindfulness-based interventions to students. If these measures are not considered, students could have a negative experience and the educator might have to address heightened emotional and behavioral episodes.

### ***Utilization of Music***

The outlier identified through the interviews involved music integration. While students and staff might enjoy personal selections of music, attempts by teachers to identify calming music did not receive well by the students. Olivia speculated, “But, they say that stresses them out more and they don’t really like it. It does provide a calmer environment, but I just think that sometimes they’re so used to the chaos that they’re not used to calming things.” This idea makes sense when accounting for students facing trauma. For a more meaningful utilization of music, teachers could talk with students to identify common songs that are relaxing to both teachers and students. Having collaborated songs might increase interest in using this skill. The additional sensory input from music integration could help provide additional cues for non-verbal students or students that require additional prompts to redirect onto new tasks. Using music as well as other creative mediums for integrating mindfulness-based interventions can encourage students to reflect on their attitude and behavior, which will lead to better decision making and

emotional/academic attention to tasks. Considering this information will be supportive in creating a safe classroom environment.

### **Research Question Responses**

Through structured interviews, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, and lesson plan reflections, teachers provided valuable information in response to mindfulness-based interventions and their applications in special education transition settings. Responses helped understand the classroom environment and personalities that make up special education transition setting classrooms. Understanding current conditions for educators can guide future research to provide mindfulness-based interventions to students with disabilities. This section reflects on the central research question of how elementary special education teachers perceive using mindfulness-based interventions. Additionally, sub-questions such as methods of implementing mindfulness, advantages, and challenges develop a thorough understanding of mindfulness-based interventions and the application in elementary special education transition settings.

#### **Central Research Question**

How do elementary teachers in special education perceive implementing mindfulness-based interventions during their instructional classes?

Elementary teachers in special education transition settings have varied experiences implementing mindfulness-based interventions during their instructional classes. This is partly due to the range of students with disabilities in their respective classrooms. Laura noted early in her student teaching experiences, “During my student teaching, I was placed in a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade learning support classroom in which we used mindfulness-based interventions by doing brain breaks, yoga, lessons on managing emotions and a lot more.” Based on intelligence, age,

and level of disability, interventions and implementation success varied across settings. Olivia recognized, “And each kid’s different. Therefore, you have to figure out your kids. I still have not. I have one here. I still have not quite have figured out. I think I am being played a lot, but I am still not 100% sure what to do with him yet. So of course, nobody else is either. So we’re all about how to help these students.”

### **Sub-Question One**

How do special education educators incorporate mindfulness into special education classes?

Several approaches were identified as resources for teachers in special education transition settings to incorporate mindfulness into special education classes. Charli said, “I mean, one of the things you learn with kids is that, you have to just continue to keep looking for those things that are going to reach each one. Moreover, I would say, since the pandemic, we have watched the kids struggle more and more emotionally. In addition, I think that is what has driven a lot of me just looking into things like that. What else should I be doing? What I could be doing?”

Some grounding techniques and breathing activities were identified as part of training through an employment or an Intermediate Unit (IU) that provides support for teachers. Felicia used previous employment to support her mindfulness growth, “The most significant exposure I had was probably in the partial hospital program. We received a lot of training in cognitive therapy techniques, and then I have to watch the therapist interact with the kids. After observing these techniques, I used some of the techniques and implemented them in my classroom to help get the kids through their days. Therefore, I learned a lot of breathing techniques. Mostly involving some training in being aware and having mindfulness and mindful meditation. Using

your body and your muscles to help get that awareness, like tensing each muscle and then, releasing that flexing and then, just seeing that stuff into play to help calm down kids to help get ready, get kids ready to learn.”

Some educators noted applications or websites such as GoNoodle, YouTube, etc., provided students with interactive mindfulness-based interventions that led to class-wide participation. Darla found in her classes, “We did a lot more of that last year (breathing activities) and that’s with a co-teacher of mine. We were talking about putting in those practices. Just practicing that deep breathing every day because we are noticing, especially as we are approaching the holidays, the hustle bustle of everything that it is turning into in our room. The kids are more disorganized. We are more disorganized and just being able to kind of self-regulate your behavior. So we’re not having maybe so many intense behaviors.” These methods are often presented to students during transition periods such as between subjects, returning from lunch or recess, or before starting activities. Teachers recognized the importance of incorporating mindfulness to bring students into the “here-and-now” so focus is redirected into the next topic. Madison commented, “Usually, I meet with these students once or twice a week and we work on social skills, emotional regulation, and different things like that. That is where I use a lot of mindfulness strategies with them to help them learn coping strategies that they can use themselves so that they don’t need to be pulled out of class or take as many breaks.”

### **Sub-Question Two**

What advantages do special educators observe when implementing mindfulness in their classes?

Teachers identified several advantages to implementing mindfulness-based interventions into their academic classes. The classroom environment is less chaotic as a result of



implementing mindfulness. Several teachers reported students having difficulties completing transitions from structured to unstructured time and vice versa. Through mindfulness-based interventions, students gain control and focus before returning to school-based activities. Another benefit comes from increased peer-to-peer interactions. Teachers recognize when students become more aware of their environment, they respect personal space of peers, reducing the possibility of negative peer interactions. Veronica noted from a life skills standpoint, “A lot of the time our goal is to get the students to understand why they did something and how it affects others, and what we can do to help others. The mindfulness skills used almost every day help get them to understand. Maybe why they did something? What else we could do and how we could move on from that.” Teachers that utilize mindfulness-based interventions recognize students engage in learning more and have higher attention to lessons when MBI are applied during academic classes. Emotionally, through MBI integration, students have less frustration and emotional outbursts. They increase their awareness in the classroom and engage with their peers more appropriately. A final advantage involves having more focus and time on tasks during academic work. When students are relaxed, they focus more on their work and can complete assignments with higher accuracy.

### **Sub-Question Three**

What barriers do educators perceive when integrating mindfulness into instructional classes?

Several challenges limit teachers in special education transition settings from implementing mindfulness-based interventions more frequently in their classrooms. One challenge most often cited involves time. Students spend large portions of their day involved in academic instruction. Teachers expressed trying to find times to incorporate mindfulness-based

interventions difficult. With utilizing pacing guides and curriculum knowledge, if teachers spend larger amounts of time on mental health needs, it becomes more challenging to bridge the learning gaps students in special education face. Madison reflected, “Me personally, it’s been minimal. Mindfulness is kind of a newer trending topic as far as what we have been utilizing within service and things. Many mindfulness-based interventions use the social-emotional side of student support. I’ve been in on a couple of different in-services where they kind of talked to us all about how to set the tone for the lesson, get those kiddos that are just struggling with their emotions and keeping all that together.” Lack of understanding is another common area teachers identified in integrating mindfulness-based interventions. Gretchen remained optimistic while expressing, “So, to be honest, I don’t really have that much background, but I definitely feel like colleges in the education realm should provide mindfulness experiences. Going over what it is, how to implement it, just learning how to help children cope and regulate their feelings. Those are types of things that I’ve learned since teaching, but I never learned any practice like that before becoming an educator.”

Whether the lack of understanding comes from administrators that fail to understand the benefit, or educators who do not have the experiences successfully implementing the skills, not having skills or resources restrict the ability and effectiveness of implementing mindfulness-based interventions. Lenny identified this thought when working with challenging students, “If they go from that annoyed to angry to the next level furious, we try to do some different skills within that, but as far as trainings, I have not received not a ton of experiences with using mindfulness.”

## Summary

Several key points reflected the importance of implementing programs such as mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition settings. Teachers recognized when supporting students with disabilities, they rarely provide support for a lone issue or diagnosis. Some students arrive in class coping with traumatic home lives, co-occurring diagnoses and interpersonal conflicts. Merely addressing the surface issues such as academic struggles often results in frustration and burnout for both students and staff. Mindfulness-based interventions can be tailored to the needs of individual students. Students with disabilities could be supported through technology applications, movement activities, focused breathing exercises, or physical movements. These interventions were often applied as a method to prevent a full-scale meltdown. All interviewed teachers' demonstrated awareness in knowing their students and the importance of developing positive relationships. Taking that relationship further, by communicating with parents or guardians, skills learned in the classroom can be applied at home and strengthened the willingness of students to use these skills when challenging situations arise.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

Chapter 5 provides evidence of the experiences teachers in special education transition settings have in implementing mindfulness-based interventions in their special education classrooms. Areas discussed in this chapter include a discussion, interpretation of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research. Explaining these findings through a variety of lenses could improve the quality of services delivered to students and families. By highlighting the benefits, administrators and other stakeholders can observe how mindfulness-based interventions can be incorporated into academic lessons. Through identification of limitations and recommendations, other researchers can identify new places to continue learning about applying mindfulness-based interventions.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to reflect on the highlighted themes identified throughout this case study. These themes highlight the purpose of mindfulness-based interventions, and additional steps to continue meeting the needs of all invested parties. Five major areas provide evidence of the necessity of mindfulness-based interventions to be utilized in special education transition settings. These subsections include Interpretation of Findings, Implications for Policy or Practice, Theoretical and Empirical Implications, Limitations and Delimitations, and Recommendations for Future Research. These areas provide a well-rounded understanding of future directions of mindfulness-based interventions for supporting the needs of students and staff.

### **Summary of Thematic Findings**

Based on the thematic findings, several core ideas were revealed. These themes included environmental issues such as specific classes mindfulness interventions were utilized into environmental stimuli that contribute to disruptive classroom behaviors. Teachers discussed the impact mindfulness-based interventions play in creating a safe, cooperative learning environment for students, para-professionals, and teachers. Mindfulness-based interventions provide an outlet for special education transition settings to reflect on how to handling stressful situations that occur in school, home, or the community. Specific interventions were identified that help bring the focus of participants into the here-and-now, where deeper understanding and connections can be made. Supporting students through mindfulness-based interventions allow students to minimize distracting and disruptive behaviors while increasing time spent on academic tasks.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

This section identifies the interpretation of findings. Specific interpretations based on the findings from structured interviews, Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, and lesson plan reflections revealed how elementary special education teachers utilize mindfulness-based interventions in their special education transition settings to support student success. The FFMQ provided information regarding the level of mindfulness present in the participants. The higher the score rated over 3.0, the higher the level of mindfulness was present for the participant. Understanding the level of mindfulness from the participant helps identify the utilization of mindfulness in classes. Nine out of ten participants met this criterion. Information in this section identifies new insights obtained as a result of the data collection. Interpretation of findings help make sense of the information provided by teachers. The findings from this case study help

better understand the perspectives special education teachers have in implementing mindfulness-based interventions in K-6 elementary special education transition settings.

### ***Specific Times for Interventions Were not Identified***

Mindfulness-based interventions were identified and utilized by every teacher that agreed to participate in this case study. Looking deeper at their interventions, one thing that stood out was when the interventions were applied. In many situations, the teacher had to have awareness of the mood of the students and classroom. They used brain breaks and other interventions when they perceived students beginning to become frustrated. Mindfulness-based interventions provided a method for helping students maintain focus and de-escalate from potentially aggressive behaviors. Teachers often utilized these interventions on an as-needed basis rather than incorporating them throughout the day. The times that interventions were structured during the day were during homeroom / check-in times first thing in the morning or if it was part of a school-sponsored curriculum. Some teachers reported when having the consistent times, peer conflicts were minimalized and less problematic behaviors were reported. The classroom dynamic had a more relaxed feel and perceived stress in the room from frustrated students was minimalized. For districts that did not provide a mindfulness initiative, teachers utilized mindfulness-based interventions infrequently when disruptive behaviors were increasing.

### ***Specific Interventions Were Tailored to Students***

Special education covers students with a range of ages, disabilities, and academic ability ranges. Another important discovery is that mindfulness-based interventions were often tailored to the students in their room. Teachers in SDI classrooms recognized they had to provide interventions at a much different level than their fellow special-education teaching peers. Due to difficulties communicating and demonstrating empathy, students required interventions and

additional cues to encourage appropriate coping skills. This happened after attempts to process with the student to help develop self-advocacy skills. Some teachers created a “calm zone” in their classrooms for students to quietly and safely process their emotions. If a student were showing signs of heightened emotional stress, teachers would offer students a 5-minute break in the “calm zone” to self-regulate their behavior. A clock or timer would be set Mindfulness-based interventions that teachers identified met students at their cognitive ability and helped in managing intense emotions. At the conclusion of the break, the teacher would walk back and process the needs of the student. If they felt they were ready to rejoin the group, they could return to the task, or be provided additional time to regroup before getting back to the academic tasks. This intervention helped maintain student focus without causing a shutdown that lasted several class periods. Each teacher identified students that required more intense interventions to transfer appropriate coping skills.

### ***Administrative Support is Critical for MBI***

The most significant finding is the role administrator’s play in supporting mindfulness-based interventions in special education transition settings. Administrators play a pivotal role in determining the training and curriculum available to teachers, directly influencing the implementation and efficacy of MBI. In the schools where curriculum and training were prioritized, increased utilization of mindfulness-based interventions were commented. Being present for teachers is one way administrators could provide support for teachers. Participating in IEP meetings and having knowledge of what behaviors are present in the classroom would help gain understanding of the need and application of MBI. With increased knowledge of how MBI supports student academic growth, they would be more inclined to provide training and support for teachers to implement MBI more consistently in their classrooms. For teachers that did not

receive direct support from administrators, they relied heavily on their own interest and willingness to identify support for their students in special education transition settings. This leads to mixed results and inconsistent utilization of MBI. Administrators could recognize that the social-emotional and coping skills being transferred to students with disabilities can support students in general education settings as well. By providing curriculum and support for the healthy mind and well-being of all students, administrators could create schools heavily influenced in compassion leading to increased time on-task in the classroom.

### ***Teachers Possess High Levels of Internal Mindfulness***

After reviewing interview data, lesson plans, and the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, it revealed the elementary special education teachers possessed a high level of mindfulness. Nine out of ten teachers scored above the 3.0 threshold of possessing high levels of mindfulness. This reflects the natural mindful nature teachers in special education transition settings possess. Having the internal awareness, they are more in tune with the needs their students. This directly leads to implementing MBI in a specialized manner to support the students in their classrooms. Whether it is yoga, movement exercises, or focused breathing, MBI within teachers can reduce burnout and increase creating a supportive classroom environment. Teachers needed to possess this skill because they had to recognize when they were feeling stressful emotions so they could help support their students. Teachers throughout the interviews described situations where they recognized students experiencing frustration during classroom lessons. They had to have present moment awareness in order to read the room and recognize when a planned mindfulness break was needed. Teachers could also relate to their students on a personal level, which helped in fostering a compassionate classroom. By possessing personal



awareness, they could identify skill deficiencies in their students and tailor mindfulness-based interventions to enhance experiences for their students.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Based on the findings in this case study, several implications for policy or practice can support the implementation of mindfulness-based interventions. These concepts would be helpful for school boards, administrators, and other stakeholders with an interest in providing skills to support the holistic development of the students in their schools. Through policy decisions, stakeholders could make decisions to increase the support for teachers whether curriculum, training, or staff support. Specifically identifying local presenters trained in mindfulness to present during teacher in-services would benefit staff. Having opportunities to share resources in department meetings would increase collaboration on mindfulness resources. Administrators could provide structured times for teachers to implement mindfulness if their understanding of mindfulness was increased. Subsections in this section include Implications for Policy and Implications for Policy and Implications for Practice. These subsections highlight the need for mindfulness-based interventions in K-6 special education transition settings and how those skills could be applied to entire school district curriculum and vision/mission statements.

#### ***Implications for Policy***

Several implications would improve the delivery of mindfulness-based interventions for both students, staff, and families. For starters, providing education and training for educators will help staff implement mindfulness-based interventions. Lensen et al., (2021) recognized as teachers increase knowledge on mindfulness-based interventions, they increase their ability to create a compassionate classroom environment where students feel safe and empowered to learn. Providing support for parents can also help in reducing stress. Wang et al., (2023) demonstrated

with mindfulness-based interventions, parents reduce stress and provide better care for students with disabilities. With parents having access to positive interventions, misbehavior decreases and appropriate coping skills can be passed to students. Providing MBI activities for students to practice at home, the skills can be transferred to families as well. In 5-10 minutes as part of a homework assignment, students could rehearse breathing, grounding practices, or reflecting in a journal. Students would benefit from a program such as “Stop Touching Your Face,” as noted in Tang et al., (2022). Not only does this type of programming reduce face touching behaviors and spread of diseases, but also increases mindfulness and increase impulse control. These interventions lead to improvement in life for all three groups. By increasing practice on MBI, students become more likely to use these skills when prompted by a teacher in school to use them when heightened emotions arise.

### ***Implications for Practice***

Several implications for practice outline ways educators in K-6 special education transition settings could integrate mindfulness-based interventions during academic periods to increase time on task for students. First, educators could utilize mindfulness techniques such as deep breathing or muscle movements as a transition from lesson to lesson. Having a consistent process such as, “Math is ending, please take 5 deep breaths, and get out your reading materials.” Having a consistent integration method helps students understand the transition. Integrating in this manner consistently could provide additional cues for students with disabilities regarding transitions from one subject to another. Teachers could even have musical cues that students identify as relaxing or calming as an indicator a transition is occurring and prepare for the next activity. Another implication for practice could include exploration of curriculum. Several teachers identified programs their districts invested in for classroom use. They recognized

students gained skills in identifying their feelings by recognizing themselves when they were experiencing frustrating feelings in the classroom. Furthermore, developing a mindfulness-based language within special education transition settings could continue to develop the skills for students to utilize at school, home, or community. Sharing these skills and the language with parents could help students rehearse skills in a variety of settings, which would lead to a higher likelihood of utilizing those skills independently across all settings. This leads to improved student outcomes and more consistent application of MBI in special education transition settings.

### **Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

The purpose so this section is to explain the theoretical and empirical implications of this case study. This case study continued to confirm previously conducted research on how mindfulness-based interventions support personal growth in students and stakeholders. Throughout interviews, teachers in special education recognized how integrating mindfulness-based interventions during academic classes helped de-escalate students during frustrating classroom activities. Addressing these concerns enables students to develop self-awareness in how they are feeling in the present moment (Albrecht, 2019; Arslan & Allen, 2020; Kabat-Zinn, 2013; McCormick et al., 2019). The present-moment awareness helps students make better decisions and not escalate into harming themselves or peers (Nhat Han 1993; Notar, 2013; Schussler, 2020). Additionally, this case study provides information that school administrators and stakeholders could use when exploring the value of utilizing mindfulness-based interventions in their school districts.

#### ***Theoretical Implications***

The theoretical foundation for this case study involved mindfulness. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2013, 2003, 1994), one of the leaders in the mindfulness field, recognized multiple applications

of mindfulness-based interventions. Whether home, community, or schools, mindfulness-based interventions have a place in providing support and control to vulnerable people (Basford et al., 2020; Caqueo-Urlizar et al., 2022; Tilley et al., 2020; Wyse et al., 2020). This case study reflects the importance of developing students with disabilities with skills that can translate after they graduate from school. Individualized Education Plans for high school-age students include transition plans that support future vocational plans (Baxter & Reeves, 2023; Kraemer et al., 2022; Raley et al., 2023). These findings suggest integrating mindfulness at the elementary level can be the entry point of acquiring skills that students carry into middle and high school.

In completing this case study, it confirmed previous research that when properly utilized, students experience less stress are able to focus more on academic lessons in their special education transition settings (Kuroda et al., 2022). The information obtained from the data collection compared to similar research on mindfulness. Teachers in special education transition settings feel pressure to support students' academic growth (Browes, 2023; Cannella-Malone et al., 2021). Social-emotional skills often take a back seat when trying to assist a student to learn on grade level (Chávez-Castillo et al., 2023; Duncan et al., 2021). Implementing mindfulness-based interventions cannot succeed without administrative support (Corbet et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2021).

### ***Empirical Implications***

Reflecting on the empirical implications provide several insights into ways teachers in special education transition settings can support students through mindfulness-based interventions. During interviews, educators noted significant changes in student behavior and attention to tasks after completing mindfulness-based interventions. FV commented, "Kids are receptive. They're calmer, they're more relaxed, it's quieter, and it's just like the air is lifted, and

it's just a totally different environment." MD reflected, "I feel like the whole mood just shifts. There is a lightness, you know, once they realize, oh, this is not just the same thing. We're going to do every day of a drill and skill and once they realize oh, we're going to do this fun activity." Addressing times of the day that could seamlessly be incorporated could help teachers more consistently apply MBI. From this case study, teachers responded to mindfulness utilization as a method to redirect students as negative behaviors intensified. LE said, "Using some different breathing techniques and trying to get kids re-centered and refocused when they become agitated. If they go from that annoyed to angry to the next level furious, we try to do some different skills within that." Even if one student has heightened emotions, GE noted MBI supports all students, "Usually if one student needs that extra brain break time, so do other students. What's beneficial for one is probably beneficial for all in a situation like that."

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

In this section, the limitations and delimitations identify areas in this case study that restricted the scope of the research. Addressing aspects such as time and participants could help readers understand how and why research criteria standards were met. In ideal situations, participants have a wide range of experiences with diverse perspectives to offer a range of viewpoints. Due to time and study restrictions, a rationale for what parameters supported or restricted the scope of the current case study. In addition to location and participant restrictions, this section also includes information regarding the research design itself. Examining the methodology could provide insights for future research on mindfulness-based interventions or special education topics.

### ***Limitations***

Several limitations were identified in the completion of this dissertation. For example, the sample pool consisted of mostly female participants with only one male represented. Having a balance of genders might provide a more diverse set of data. All willing participants were Caucasian. Attempts were made to contact educators from a variety of districts in three counties in PA and several counties in MD for a more diverse pool of participants. Within MBI, several teachers had minimal training experiences with utilizing MBI in their classrooms. Having a participant pool with educators more familiar with implementing MBI in special education transition settings could improve outcomes for students and staff. However, only three districts were represented after contacting over 18 different schools and county-based education providers. While the participating educators represented meaningful data to the area, generalizations might be challenging to apply to other settings due to demographic information being different in more urban areas compared to the rural settings applied in this case study.

### ***Delimitations***

Delimitations were identified for the purpose of this study. The participants were all over 21 with educational specializations in special education. They would have experience working specifically in special education K-6 settings providing learning instruction to students with disabilities. The location was provided to allow in-person interviews to occur if the participants experienced technical problems. A benefit of having the geographical location of participants from the same area reflects the cultural beliefs and similar socio-economically challenged students. Future recommendations would include researching administrators to receive their input on MBI. Expanding the research from special education to general elementary school grades could provide additional information on future studies for MBI.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current case study focused on the perspectives of elementary teacher's experiences utilizing mindfulness in elementary K-6 transition settings. Several recommendations could guide further research in mindfulness-based interventions. For starters, the expansion of interventions from elementary to junior high and senior high could provide insight on how these skills progress as students develop. IEP goals are updated annually, and as students gain mindfulness skills, their coping skill goals may need adjusted as well. Maintaining consistent interventions between buildings could also improve student performance as they transition to a new building. Researchers could examine more urban settings to see if educators face different challenges providing mindfulness-based interventions to students. MBI could support challenges students with disabilities face. Providing input from different geographical regions could help represent different cultural areas. Respecting cultural norms should also improve the effectiveness of MBI. Gaining more representation from male special education teachers would additionally bring more diversity to the study. Additionally, finding administrators to study would provide a starting point for gaining more acceptance in utilizing MBI across educational settings. Having administrators on board with MBI implementation could increase staff willingness to implement MBI in their classrooms. With MBI having a mental health component, collaboration with sociology or psychology departments could help in identifying new ways to support students with disabilities in gaining mindfulness skills. Any of these recommendations provided could enhance this current study and bring new insights to deliver mindfulness-based interventions to students in special education transition settings.

## Conclusion

Teachers and students work together to create a safe and supportive learning environment. The problem identified through the literature review involved supporting students develop coping and interpersonal skills to lead successful lives as adults in special education transition settings. Since teachers in special education transition settings work closely with both students and families in transferring skills, understanding their perspectives incorporating mindfulness-based interventions highlight strengths, weaknesses, and ways to support successful implementation. This case study format provided me with data to take back to administrators in my area to advocate for programming. Throughout this study, teachers articulated in word and action the importance of having a variety of interventions available to support students with disabilities. The case study identified teachers in special education transition settings did utilize MBI to support students' academic and emotional needs. Many of these interventions were used as a reactive response to student behavior in class, rather than proactive interventions to prevent escalating behaviors from occurring. Teachers described relationships with students and staff that lead to life-long relationships. Mindfulness-based interventions provide an intervention that teachers could use in individual, small group, or classroom interventions. When applied consistently, the classroom environment was calmer, and students were more receptive to the academic content being presented in the classroom. The present-moment experiences encourages participation and rehearsal of skills. The questionnaires, interviews, and lesson plan data reflected the comments teachers identified in best practices for implementing mindfulness. If given time to collaborate in professional development or pods, teachers recognized shared lesson plan ideas support student learning. This cannot be achieved without administrative support.



Schools have a unique position when it comes to supporting students with disabilities. They collaborate with families to develop plans to meet academic and vocational goals. Along with the transition plans, educators and families identify ways students will progress from school to a future vocation. To successfully meet these goals, students must develop the appropriate coping skills to meet the challenges of adulthood. Mindfulness-based interventions have proven to bring focus to the present and allow students and adults to calmly face troublesome situations. Implications from this case study include MBI supported students in special education transition settings with increased time-on-task during academic lessons, reduced emotional frustration in class, and increased positive peer-to-peer relations. Students that learn coping strategies such as mindfulness-based interventions gain a valuable skill in navigating the challenges of adulthood. Having the ability to rehearse skills in class provides students with teachable moments to positively engage with peers in a supportive environment. By rehearsing mindfulness-based interventions, students learn how to develop awareness in how their interactions affect their peers. Additionally, through situational awareness development from mindfulness-based interventions, students can learn to avoid people and situations that trigger negative reactions and improve the quality of their lives. By acquiring mindfulness tools, students gain the ability to self-regulate their emotions and become more self-aware citizens, which will create a more caring and empathetic society as they graduate and move into adulthood.

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## Appendix A

### Institutional Review Board Approval

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 1, 2023

Matthew Bilchak  
Patricia Ferrin

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1211 EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS IN K-6 SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY

Dear Matthew Bilchak, Patricia Ferrin,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification

submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,  
**G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP**  
***Administrative Chair***  
**Research Ethics Office**

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Flyer

Dear Professional Colleague & Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, my name is Matt Bilchak and I am conducting research for my dissertation as part of the requirements for my Doctorate in Special Education (Ph D.) to understand better the experiences of educators in special education transition settings implementing mindfulness. My research aims to identify how educators choose to utilize mindfulness practices during their special education instructional classes, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

The participants in this study consist of elementary public school teachers with a valid state teaching license certified in special education or working under the direct supervision of a licensed special education teacher (i.e. student teachers). These educators in special education transition settings provide students in grades kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup>-grade academic instruction in various settings. The range will consist of 10-15 educators with a mixed number of qualified service years. All participants will have earned at least a bachelor's degree, with some obtaining a master's degree, master's equivalent, or even doctoral degree.

Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire, complete a lesson plan reflection, and participate in an audio-recorded interview. Participants will also be asked to review their interview transcripts to confirm accuracy or agreement. It should take approximately 2.5 hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested for this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must type your name and the date on the consent document and email it to me prior to participation.

Sincerely,

Matthew Bilchak  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

[REDACTED]

## Appendix C

### Study Information Sheet

**Title of the Project:** EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATORS IN IMPLEMENTING MINDFULNESS IN K-6 SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION SETTINGS: A CASE STUDY

**Principal Investigator:** Matthew Bilchak, Graduate Student at Liberty University. Ph D. Doctoral Candidate in Special Education, School of Education, Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The participants in this study consist of elementary public school teachers with a valid state teaching license certified in special education at least 18 years or older. To participate, you must be an educator in a K-6 setting working in a special education classroom. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this case study is to understand the experiences teachers in special education classrooms have in implementing mindfulness exercises during their classes.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. First task involves an audio-recorded interview that will take about 1 hour to complete via Microsoft Teams. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for accuracy. Once the transcriptions are complete, the participants will have an opportunity to review the transcript to confirm the agreement with the statements provided. The interview will consist of 14 open-ended questions to explore how teachers in special education settings use mindfulness.
2. The Second task involves completing a reflection on how the educator uses mindfulness in classes. Forms will be provided where educators provide insight on where, when, and how mindfulness activities were utilized during special education instruction classes. Participants will be asked to provide 5-7 examples of times in class they utilized mindfulness.
3. The third task involves completing the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) Survey, which will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The FFMQ consists of 39 Likert-Scale questions to identify traits of educators that utilize mindfulness.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

- Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.
- Benefits to society include understanding interventions that could support at-risk or underserved populations. The information provided from this activity will lead to developing best practices for helping students learn and practice mindfulness as a coping skill.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

- The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.
- Measures are taken to maintain confidentiality and safety throughout the interviews and data collection.
- I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I must report it to the appropriate authorities.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

- The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.
- Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be [used in future research studies] [and/or] [shared with other researchers]. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked external hard drive locked in a secure locked cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked external hard drive locked in a secure locked cabinet for three years until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then deleted/erased. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

#### **Is study participation voluntary?**

- Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University.
- If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

#### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph.
- Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

#### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

- The researcher conducting this study is Matthew Bilchak. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Pat Ferrin at [REDACTED].

#### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

## **Appendix D**

### **Research Questions**

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences of elementary teachers in special education in implementing mindfulness-based interventions during their instructional classes?

#### **Sub-Question One**

How do special education educators incorporate mindfulness into special education classes?

#### **Sub-Question Two**

What advantages do special educators observe when implementing mindfulness in their classes?

#### **Sub-Question Three**

What barriers do educators perceive when integrating mindfulness into instructional classes?

## Appendix E

### Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire

Please rate each of the following statements with the number that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you.	Never or very rarely true	Rarely True	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true
40. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
41. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings. (D).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
42. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
43. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
44. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
45. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
46. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words. (D)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
47. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
48. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
50. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
51. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking (D-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
52. I am easily distracted. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
53. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
54. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
55. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things. (D-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
56. I make judgements about whether my thoughts are good or bad. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
57. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
58. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "Step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
59. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
60. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
61. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words. (D-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
62. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
63. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
64. I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking. (NJ-	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



R)					
65. I notice the smells and aromas of things. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
66. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words. (D)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
67. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
68. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I am able just to notice them without reacting. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
69. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
70. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
71. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words. (D)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
72. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go. (NR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
73. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
74. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad depending what the thought or image is about. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
75. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior. (OBS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
76. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail. (D)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
77. I find myself doing things without paying attention. (AA-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
78. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas. (NJ-R)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Appendix F

### Lesson Plan Review Examples

Date of Lesson	•
Time activity occurred	•
Duration of activity	•
Mindfulness intervention utilized	•
Strengths of the activity	• • •
Weaknesses	• • •
Any additional information?	• • • • • •

## Appendix G

### Interview Question Examples

#### *Individual Interview Questions*

1. Please describe your educational background and experiences utilizing mindfulness-based interventions. CRQ
2. What training or learning experiences have you had implementing mindfulness-based interventions? CRQ
3. What activities do you utilize when providing mindfulness-based interventions to students? SQ1
4. What resources or training have you identified to gain information on mindfulness-based practices? SQ2
5. How have you incorporated mindfulness-based interventions into your special education classes? SQ1
6. In what academic classes have you attempted to implement mindfulness activities? SQ1
7. When are available times to implement mindfulness-based interventions during the school day? SQ2
8. Describe what advantages you have observed in implementing mindfulness-based interventions into instructional classes? SQ3
9. What would be a motivating factor for increasing your willingness to implement mindfulness more often in your everyday classes SQ3
10. Describe your classroom environment before and after implementing mindfulness-based interventions? SQ1

11. What could administrators do to support you in integrating mindfulness-based interventions? SQ3
12. What disabilities present the most challenges when conducting mindfulness-based interventions in classes? SQ2
13. What additional factors or opportunities do you see to implement mindfulness in special education classes? SQ3
14. What else would you like to add to our discussion of your experiences with implementing mindfulness-based interventions in special education classes that we haven't discussed?  
SQ2