



# Cultivating Mindfulness of Early Childhood Educators in Nebraska

CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood

April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018

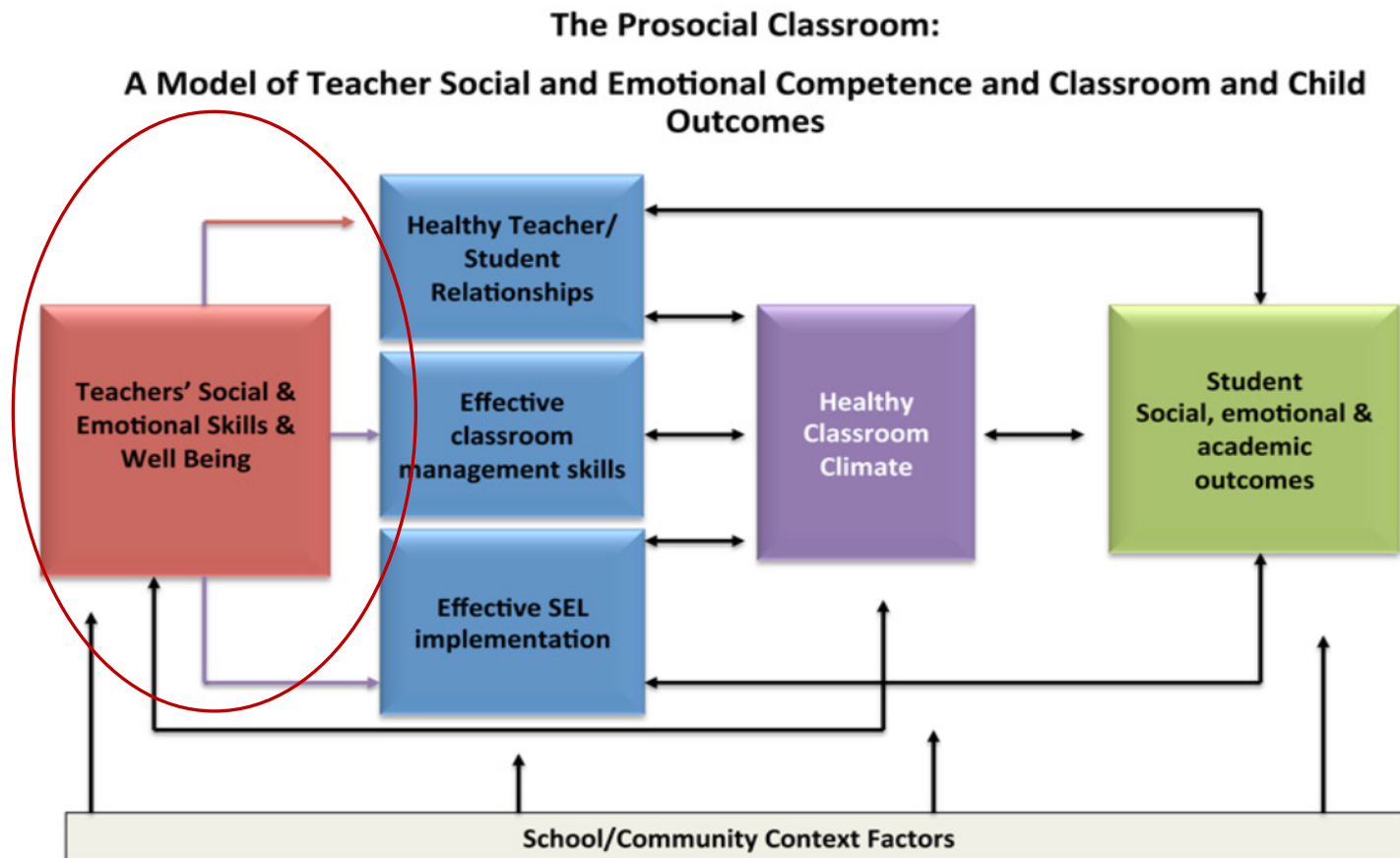
Holly Hatton-Bowers



# Why focus on **mindfulness and well-being** of early childhood educators?

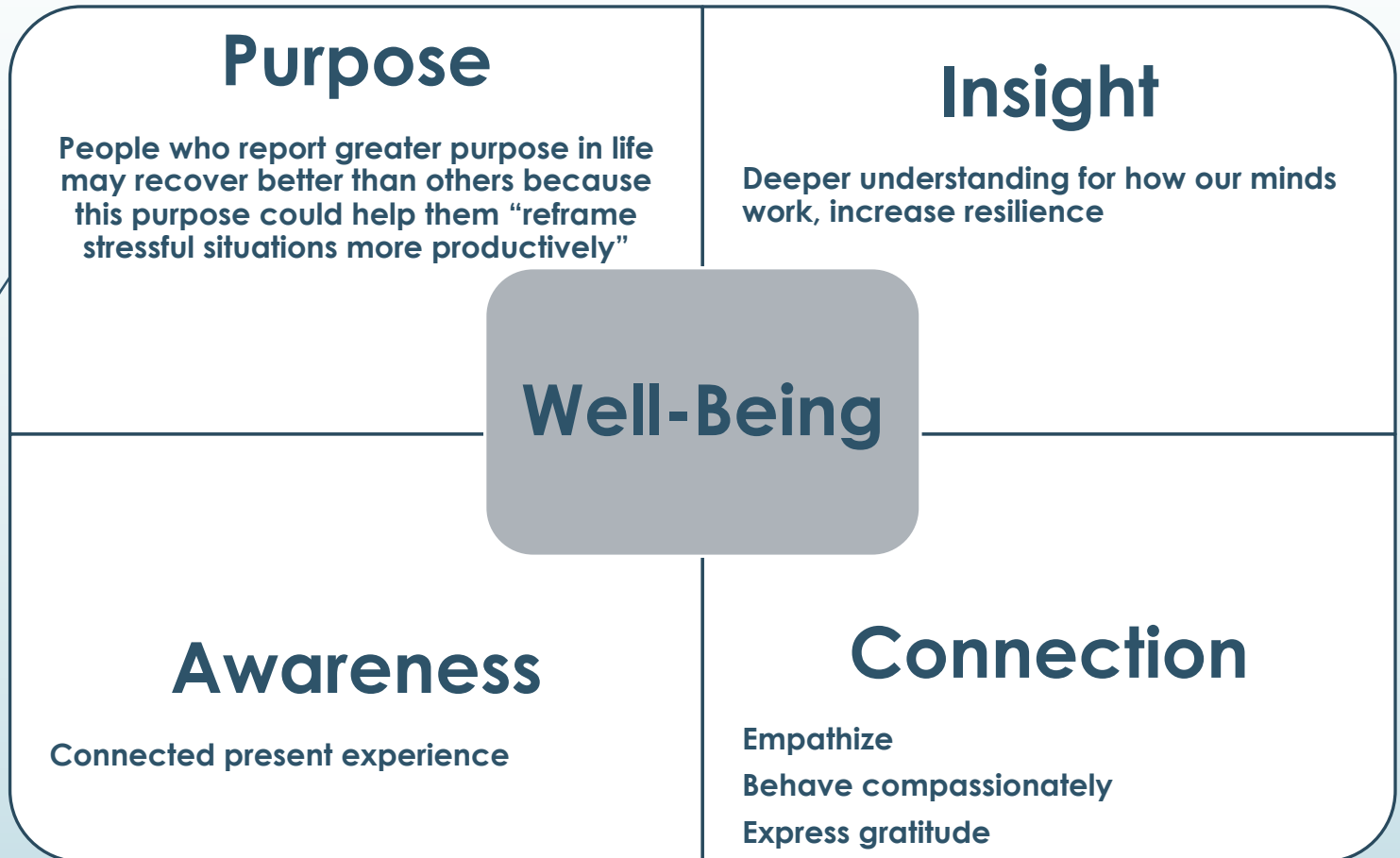
- National reports indicate early childhood educators experience high levels of stress
  - Low wages, low occupational prestige, low levels of role preparation
  - 24% of Early Head Start teachers reported a diagnosis of clinical depression (Whitaker et al., 2012)
- High stress undermines teacher's ability to build and maintain effective relationships with young children (Jeon, Hur, & Buettner, 2016; Zinssert et al., 2016).
- **Accumulating emotional toll of stress** trigger '**burnout cascade**' in early childhood educators, responsiveness and sensitive care deteriorate, children's behavior become less regulated

# Address the issue of high stress and burnout of early childhood educators



# Well-Being is a Skill

- “Well-being is fundamentally no different than learning to play the cello.” neuroscientist Richard Davidson







# Background of the Research

- It is important that teachers develop the capacity to regulate their emotions both for their well-being and to maintain a positive emotional climate in the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).
- Stress coping skills can cultivate teachers' protective factors (e.g., emotional resilience) to help them effectively adapt during challenging teaching experiences (Beshai, McAlpine, Weare, & Kuyken, 2016).
- Research (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Flook, Goldgerg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013) suggests that mindfulness techniques help teachers in developing their socio-emotional competence (dealing more effectively with stress) and promoting their well-being.



What is mindfulness?

What is reflection?

How do they relate to well-being?





# Why Reflective Practice Matters

*“The capacity to reflect and engage in candid introspection is at the core of achieving self-awareness. Reflective practitioners think creatively, imaginatively, and at times self-critically about what they are doing. Individuals who use a variety of reflective practices have a better understanding of themselves”*

■ (Bloom, 2007).

# What is Mindfulness?

**Mindfulness** is a state of awareness and a practice;

- it involves attending to the present moment and cultivating an attitude of curiosity, openness and acceptance of one's experience.
- It is a secular (non-religious) practice and is backed by compelling scientific evidence.
- “Mindfulness is the practice of **paying attention here and now**, with **kindness and curiosity**, so that we can **choose** our behavior.” – Dr. Amy Saltzman







# Created Cultivating Healthy Intentional Mindful Educators (CHIME)

Health promoting intervention to enhance the wellbeing of early childhood teachers and the young children they care for

- Using Strategies to cultivate mindfulness and reflection

# Pilot Study:

## Reflection and Mindfulness to Increase Teacher Well-Being in Early Childhood Centers

- Created a mindfulness-based intervention (CHIME) to see if small group sessions (**Guided Reflection Groups**) focused on reflection and mindfulness reduce teacher stress and burnout and enhance mindfulness leading to more sensitive caregiving and less stress in the classroom.
  - 2 hour overview of mindfulness in ECE and reflection
  - Meet every other week for one hour in small groups (3-6 people in a group) seven times with 3 different facilitators
  - Journaling at the beginning and end of EACH session
  - Short guided meditations and Listening to Understand Activity
  - Activities to use with children



Jaci Foged



Carrie Gottschalk



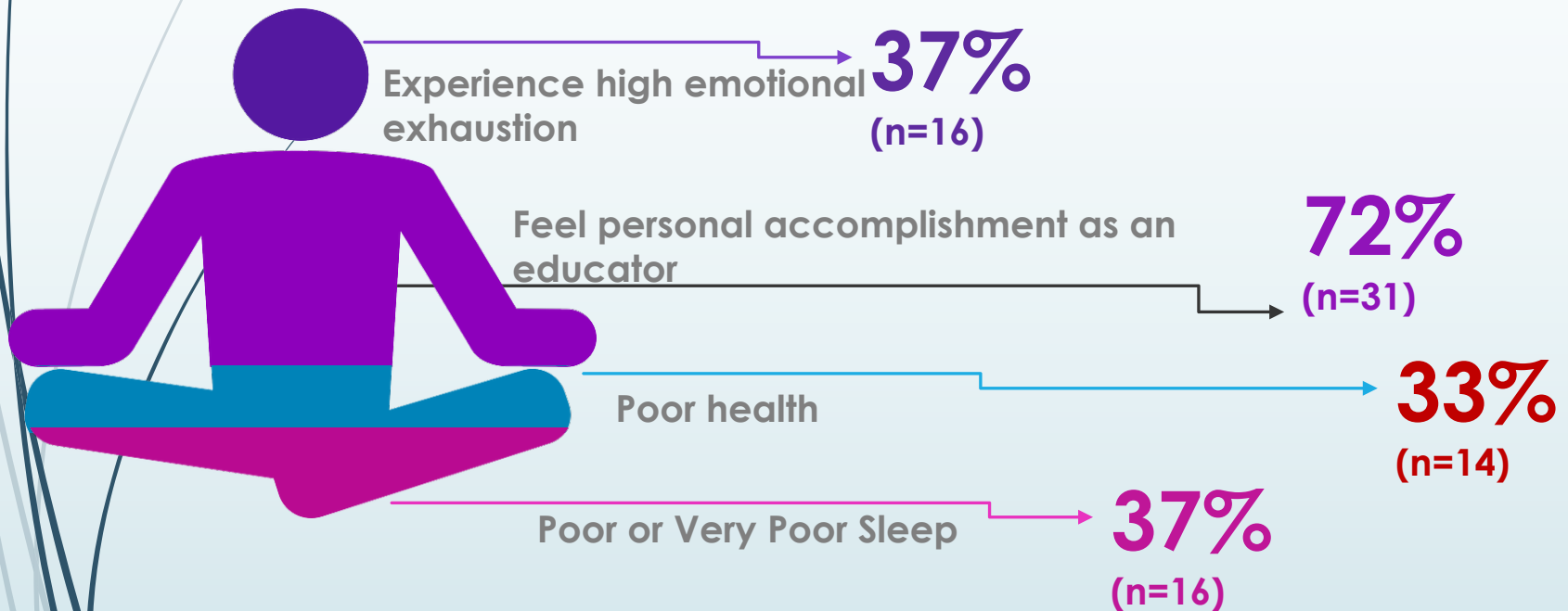
LaDonna Werth

# Aims and goals of the CHIME pilot study

1. Examine the acceptability and feasibility of the CHIME program delivered bi-weekly over 7 weeks.
2. Examine preliminary data to see if there are increases in well-being, decrease of stress of early childhood educators
  - Collected pre- and post-tests, self-report, saliva (passive drool) and journal reflections

# Participants in the Pilot

- Started with 45 ECE teachers providing care to children 0-5 years of age (3 different programs 1 program two different site), 44 females, 1 male
  - No one regularly practiced yoga, 2 people regularly meditated





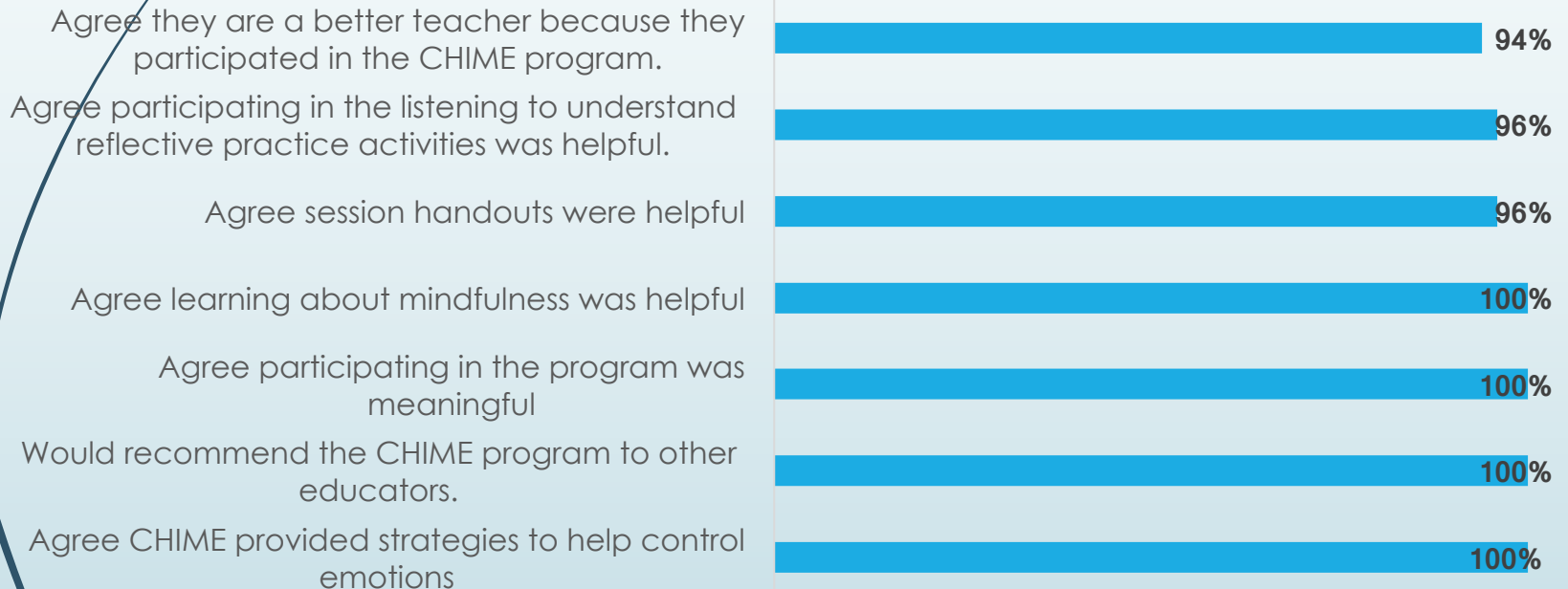


What did we learn in  
implementing CHIME?

# Acceptability

- 15% (N=7) quit their jobs, 2 people were fired, 2 people stopped participating
- More people stating they practice mindful meditations (4% at pre and 22% at post-intervention)

## Acceptability of of the CHIME program (n=34)

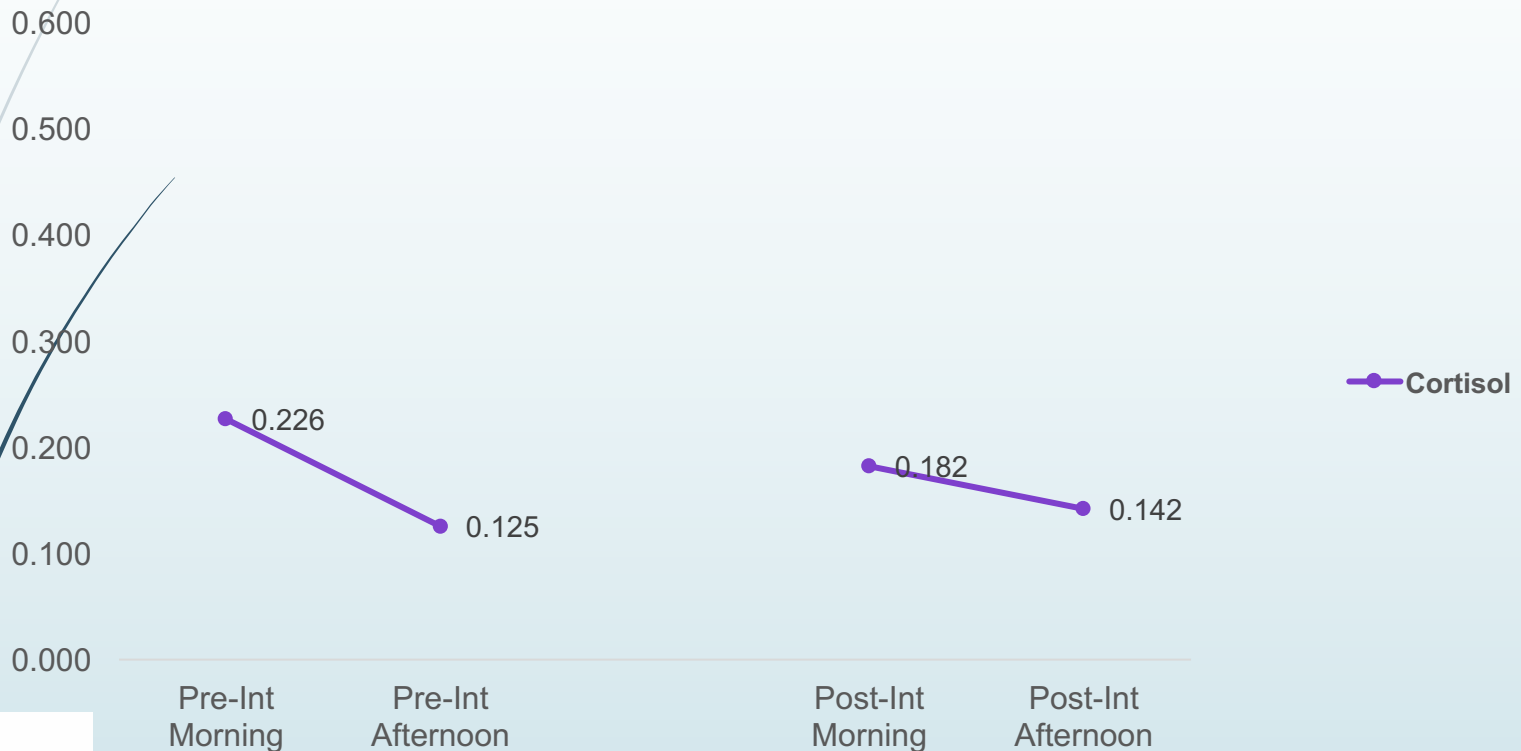


# Pilot Findings

- Significant **decrease in emotional exhaustion**
  - Before-CHIME (M=3.72, SD=1.26) and After CHIME(M=3.37, SD=1.17);  $t(33)=2.36$ ,  $p = .02$ .
- Significant **decrease in perceived stress**
  - Before-CHIME (M=2.84, SD=.31) and After CHIME(M=2.10, SD=.50);  $t(33)=4.78$ ,  $p = .00$ .
- Significant **increase in perceived control at work**
  - Before-CHIME (M=2.93, SD=.61) and After CHIME(M=3.38, SD=.48)  $t(33)=4.26$ ,  $p < .00$ .
- Significant **increase in being more mindfully observant and aware**
  - Before-CHIME (M=3.33, SD=.54) and After CHIME(M=3.57, SD=.58)  $t(33)=2.91$ ,  $p = .01$ .
- Significant **increase in perceiving better sleep**
  - Before-CHIME (M=2.45, SD=1.32) and After CHIME(M=3.33, SD=.78)  $t(33)=2.71$ ,  $p = .01$ .
- Significant **increase in perceiving better general health**
  - Before-CHIME (M=2.32, SD=.54) and After CHIME(M=2.67, SD=.64)  $t(33)=2.32$ ,  $p = .03$ .

# Pilot Findings: Preliminary Results

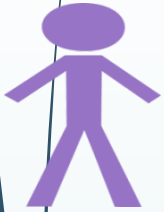
**All Programs  
Average Cortisol Levels**





# Experiences of Participants

- Sonia, infant teacher, *"I use a lot of the meditation in my life now. It makes me think before reacting to different things going on. And working with the infants and other teachers...The one activity I'll maintain in my daily or life challenges is the breathing. There are so many different ways to breathe for different problems or challenges in everyday life...I have enjoyed this class and how it has changed my way of thinking and relaxing myself and mind."*
- Anna, preschool teacher, *"Being mindful has helped me be more present in my daily life and I plan on continuing to practice mindfulness. It has helped me to have a more positive outlook, and even to be more open and honest about my emotions."*
- Maria, preschool teacher, *"I really enjoyed learning about mindfulness and how I can, as a person, be more mindful. This helped me reflect on myself where I need to grow in my mindfulness to help with my stress and anxiety that I get at times over very simple things. I plan to review my information and grow in my mindfulness as a teacher and a mom and wife."*



# Suggested Improvements

- Have trust in group members when reflecting, not having things reported back to management.
- Receive reminders to be “mindful”
- Important to have director and management participate in the program so that educators feel more supported
- Would like to have a **mindful space** for the educators to go to practice formal mindfulness and a place to rejuvenate
- **Attend to the organizational culture** to address burnout and promote well-being.

# Next Steps

- Revised the program and created a curriculum, draft 2
  - Expanded sessions to be 1.5 hours, added daily practice for mindfulness and reflecting on mindfulness in the classroom
- Currently being offered through Lancaster Extension (2<sup>nd</sup> pilot, assess revisions)
- Offer as an 8-week program (offer sessions as consecutive weeks)
- Currently being reviewed by experts of mindfulness and education
- Using Remind to send suggested guided meditations, quotes, and “reminders” to be mindful
- Implement with a randomized controlled study

# Thank you!



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