

# Mindful Practices Affect Teacher Well-Being



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“Teachers are among the **true culture heroes of our time.**

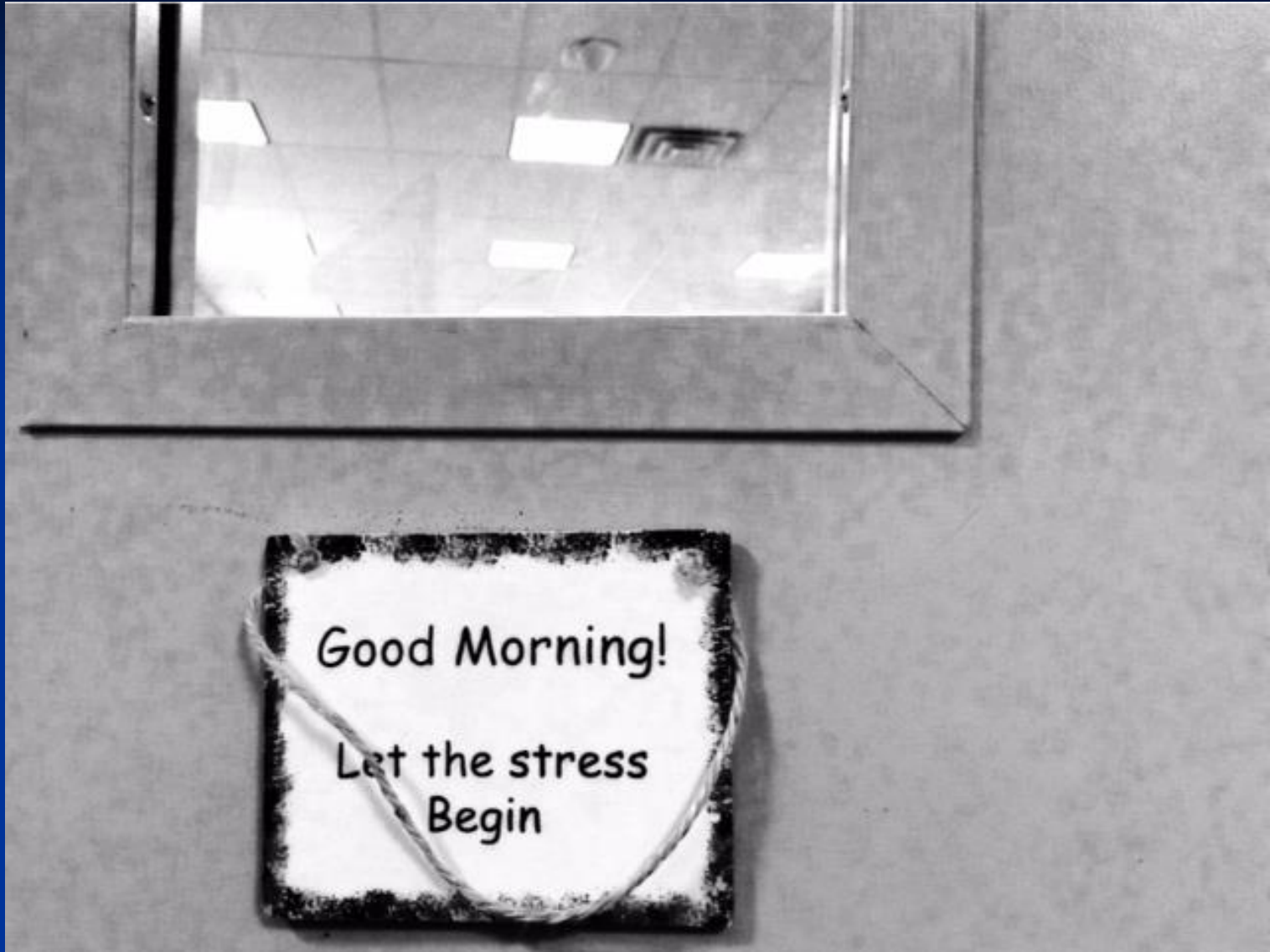
Daily they must deal with children who have been damaged by social pathologies that no one else has the will to cure.

Daily they are berated by politicians, the public and the press for their alleged inadequacies and failures.

And **daily they return to their classrooms**, opening their hearts and minds in hopes of helping children do the same.

**There has to be a way to support teachers’  
resilience and hero-ness.”**

*~ Parker Palmer, 2007  
The Courage to Teach*



Good Morning!

Let the stress  
Begin

# Rationale for Study

Record teacher **burnout and turnover** is bolstered by:

- intense pressures from standardized testing
- all-encompassing teacher evaluations
- increasingly complicated needs of students

The **need is greater than ever** to find effective means to support these hard-working teachers.

The **well-being that teachers bring** into their classrooms each day has a profound impact on their ability to **reach, teach and support their students.**

# Rate of Turnover

The *National Commission on Teaching and America's Future* gives this report:

- more than **1/3** of all teachers **leave after 3 years**
- almost **1/2** leave **within their first 5 years.**

These numbers have been steadily on the increase over the **last 3 decades.**

~ Kopkowski, 2012



# Causes of Burnout

- Lack of personal engagement and genuine connection
- emotional exhaustion
- psychological distress
  - **51%** reported **great stress 4 days a week** in 2012 (up 70% since 1985)
- job satisfaction (all-time low)
  - **39% in 2012** compared to **62% in 2008**
- pressure, scrutiny and heightened accountability - linked to standardized tests.

~ *Ward (2012) and Flook (2013)*





# The Cost and Impact of Turnover

More than **one million** classroom leaders endure job transition every year in the US.

The estimated national price tag for this “teacher revolving door” is **\$7 billion annually**.

*~ Kopkowski, 2012*

High attrition in schools **not only impacts educator** performance and success but also **harms** the school environment and **student experience**.

*~ Ingersoll, 2012*



# So if they can stay...

According to Palmer (2007), teaching is a vocation that requires a **doling out of our inner selves**. It is the sum of **heart, effort and care**. True teaching emerges from one's self, however that may be, for better or for worse.



Caring for the **teacher's inner self** becomes critical for **endurance of the profession**.

# Teacher Self Care

“As educators our **secret weapon** is our warm, open heart and our caring presence.” To keep our hearts warm and open requires that **we care for ourselves first.**

Teachers who create **self-care habits** and a means of enhancing **inner resources** are able to find balance in this heartfelt work.”

~ *Tish Jennings*

*Mindfulness for Teachers*

# Mindfulness Training for Teachers

**Mindfulness training** has emerged across many disciplines as a means to manage and even reduce the negative effects of **prolonged stress**.

*~ Flook, 2013*

Mindfulness has been found to **bolster the inner lives and performances** of people living and working in **stressful situations** – even on the front lines of battle.

*~ Stanley, USMC, 2007*

Therefore **mindfulness** shows promise for doing the same for our teachers, on the **front lines of schools**.

# Studies in Mindfulness for Teachers

- Botwinik (2012) **Mindful, self-protective practices:** Self awareness, attention training, realistic limit-setting, boundary maintenance (clear shift from school to home), mindful movement & physical fitness – **affected burnout rates.**
- Frias (2015) After practicing **mindfulness**, a teacher noted that when facing a conflict, she **pauses and checks in on herself** – for what she is really feeling in the moment and chooses to **respond rather than react.**

# Community Approach to Learning Mindfully

- Jennings (2015) CALM program - 4 workshops/week over 16 weeks = significant benefits for educators:
  - positive **affect** more often (in and out of school)
  - better classroom **management**
  - higher distress **tolerance**
  - less physical **symptoms**
  - lower **blood pressure**

“Mindfulness may be the **simplest, safest and most effective way** to promote the kindness and attention that we want for ourselves **and for our children.**” ~ Tim Ryan, US Congressman, Ohio

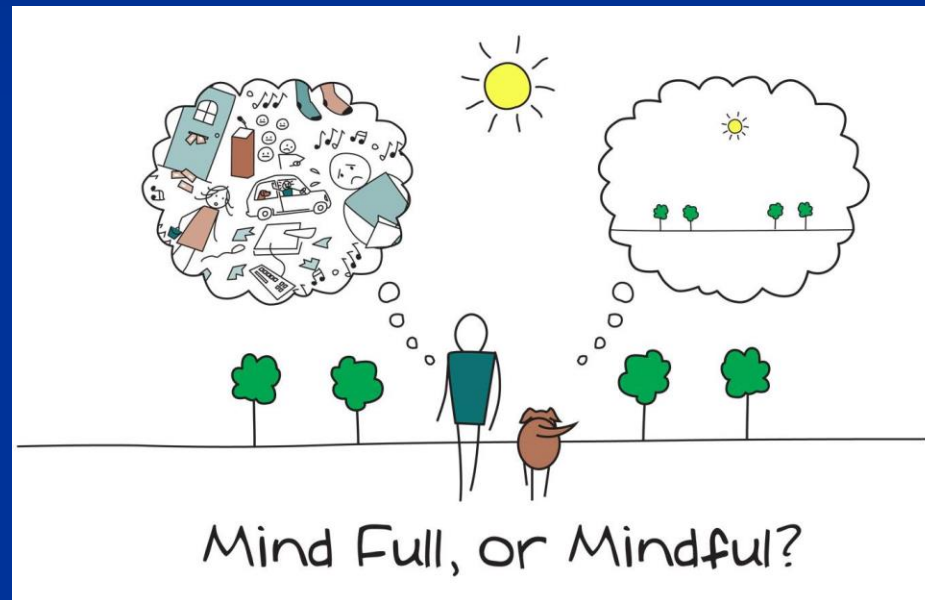




# What is Mindfulness?

“Mindfulness is **being present** to your internal thoughts, emotions and sensations **with a calm mind.**”

~ *Sam Himmelstein, Ph.D.*



“Mindfulness is **slowing down and single-tasking.**”

~ *Christopher Willard, Ph.D.*

# Mindful Practices (a sample)



# Research Study

Retaining good teachers and providing them with strategies for **managing stress**, enhancing **well-being** and **integrating those qualities** into the classroom culture is the focus of this study.

## Research Question:

Can a six-week **mindful practice program** of self-care positively affect the **well-being** of teachers?

# Methods

## Mindful Practices

- guided and individual practices
- 4 group sessions over a 6-week period
- resources to support a sustainable personal practice

## 2 Measurement Tools

- pre and post well-being surveys
- written reflections on well-being



# Participants

## Teachers / Participants:

- elementary school (K-6) in **suburban district**
- school enrolls 632 students, average class size is 20
- 16 full-time teachers **volunteered** (all female)
- 5+ years in the profession
- included classroom core, special education, reading support and physical education

## Researcher / Instructor:

- 16 years classroom teaching (K-6), public and private
- 13 years practicing, teaching and training in mindfulness



# Apparatus

## Wellness Works Survey for Educators (sample)

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

My level of stress at work is manageable.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel the demands of this work are reasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
I maintain healthy connections with my students.	1	2	3	4	5
My night-time sleep is restorative.	1	2	3	4	5

## Written Reflection – Guide Questions (sample)

How do you feel your personal practice is coming along?

What are the bright spots to these practices?

What are some road-blocks that you have encountered?



# Procedure

## Group Session Components:

- 1) **Introduction** to Mindful Practices for Teachers
- 2) **Breath Awareness – Checking In**
- 3) **Nervous System**

Stress Response

- 4) **Mind/Body Awareness**

- Posture
- Movement
- Resting



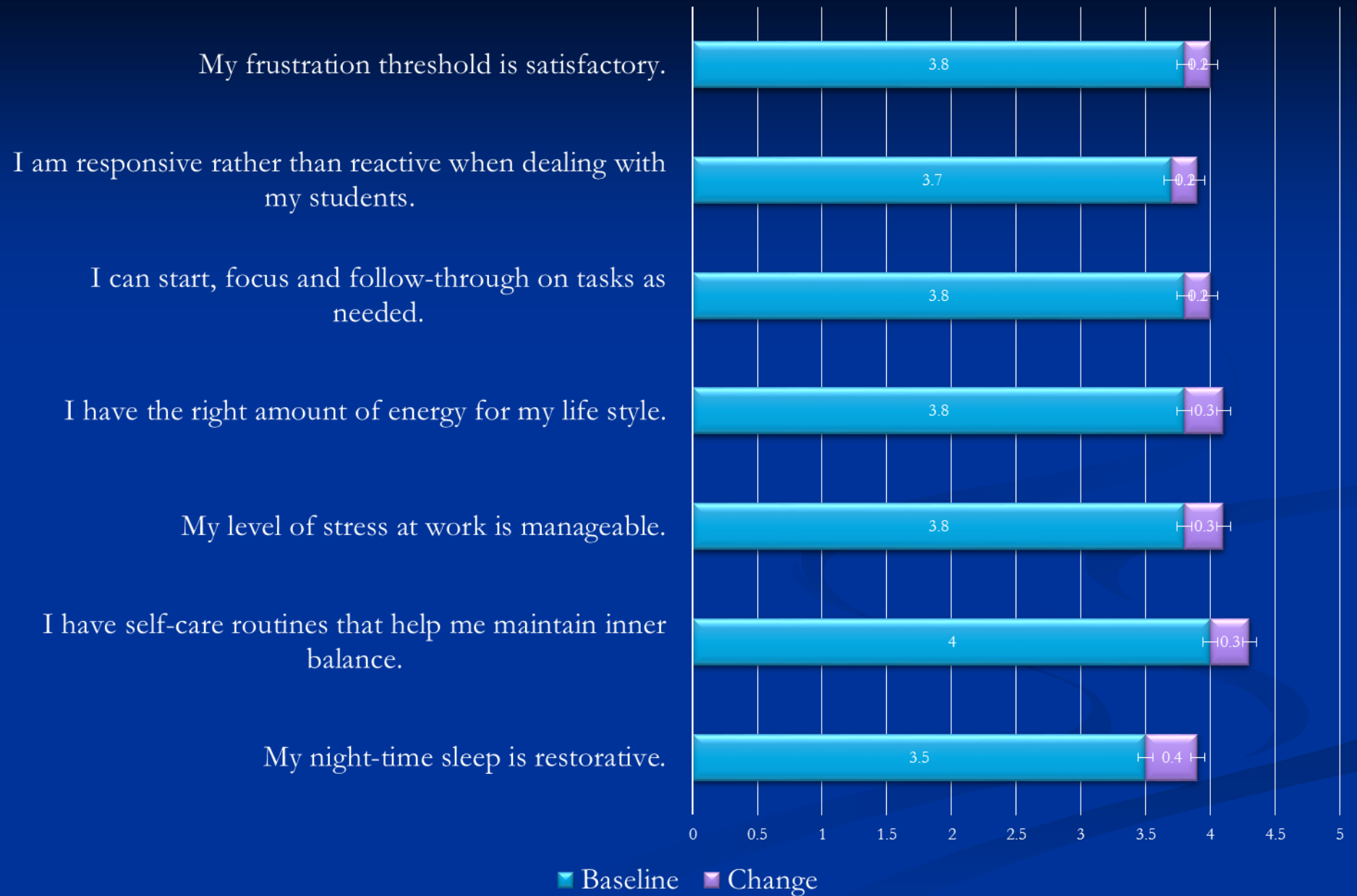
# Results

After the 6-week period, **10 teachers** responded with completed pre and post Surveys and as well as Reflections.

**Baseline averages** were somewhat high (*agree*) on the Well-being Survey (3.92 out of 5), possibly indicating that the teachers' **sense of well-being** started out quite **solid**.

The results of this study do show **some improvement** relating to **helpful traits** with the **greatest change**.

## Greatest Change Over Time



# Written Reflections

- How do you feel your **personal practice** is coming along?

*I was using more at school, not as much in my personal/family life.*

*Summer vacation will give me more time to try them.*

- What are the **bright spots** to these practices /this program?

*My days after the mornings we practiced as a group were less stressful.*

# More Reflections

- What are some **road-blocks** that you have encountered regarding the practices?

*Time.*

*It took me **a while** to find which practices came naturally for me.*

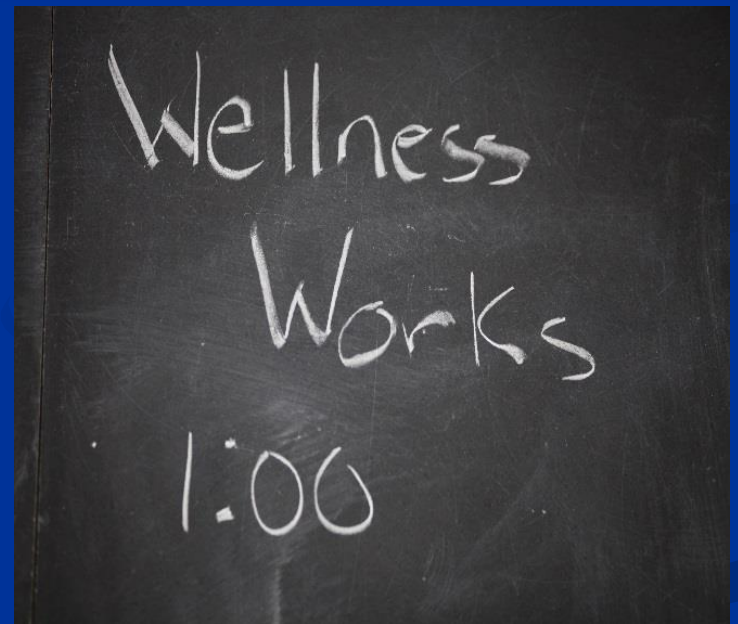
*Audio practices would be great. I don't do well on my own.*

*I need **more time in** group sessions. I love doing this work with my friends.*

# Implications

As other studies have shown, mindfulness practices **integrated into the lives of teachers** can impact well-being.

When **time** for self-care is given a high priority, the effects may prove more prominent.





# Time Implications

**Time** is invaluable in all school settings. **Time** is also a critical piece in helping teachers with their own self-care.

Caregivers often need to be given **permission** as well as **time** to care for themselves.

We are currently piloting a **year-long, teacher training** with **12 hours** of guided group practice.

Maybe **time** will tell.

# Future Sharing

## Research Symposiums at Education Conferences:

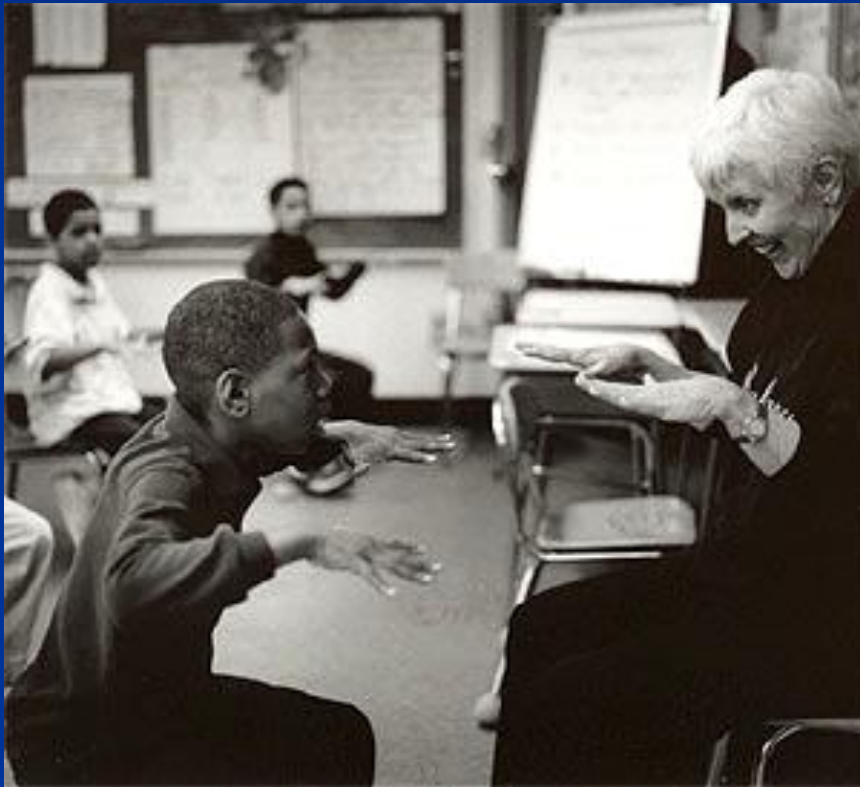
- Mindfulness in Education Network (2017)
- IU13 Annual Education Conference (2017)
- UCSD Medical School – Mindfulness in Education (2018)

## Future Presentations to District Administrators:

- Elizabethtown Area School District
- Penn Manor School District
- School District of Lancaster

# *Wellness Works in Schools*

Began in 2001 in the School District of Lancaster, PA



*Midge Kinder M.Ed.*



*Rick Kinder MBA*