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# The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Middle School Special Education Students

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# The Effects of a Mindfulness-Based Intervention on Middle School Students with Special Needs

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# Statement of the Problem

- 6.1 million students ages 6 to 21 received special education services for the 2017-2018 school year.<sup>1</sup>
- 3.8 million spent 80% or more of their day within the general education setting.<sup>2</sup>
- 31% of teens felt overwhelmed due to stress.<sup>3</sup>
- Middle school students typically lack the strategies to manage stress.

# What is mindfulness?

- According to the Literature:

The process by which we pay attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally <sup>4</sup>

- For the Purpose of this Study:

The act of paying attention in an intentional way while focusing on one's breathing



# Review of the Literature

## Mindfulness in Schools

- Potential benefits <sup>5</sup>
  - improved functioning and academic performance
  - decrease in suspensions
  - increase in attendance
- Potential barriers <sup>6</sup>
  - fiscal restraints
  - person delivering mindfulness intervention

## Mindfulness & Special Education

- Social-Emotional Regulation <sup>7</sup>
  - increased inhibitory control led to improved emotional control and decreased aggression
- Academic <sup>8</sup>
  - increased executive functioning skills had a direct correlation to higher measures of academic success. Practicing mindfulness enhanced working memory capacity.

## Gap in Literature

Little to no research on the effectiveness of mindfulness on:

- Middle school students
- Middle school special needs students
- Special needs students' behavior in the Gen Ed setting

# Research Questions

How does incorporating a mindfulness-based intervention affect the school experience of middle school students with special needs?

- How does the intervention affect special needs students' attention and behavior in the general education setting?
- How do these students' self-perceptions change in response to the intervention?

# Methodology

- Northern California middle school
- 10 participating students
  - 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade
  - male
  - Latino
  - qualify for Special Education services under OHI, SLD, ID
- 5 participating staff
  - 4 Gen. Ed. Teachers
  - 1 Instructional Assistant

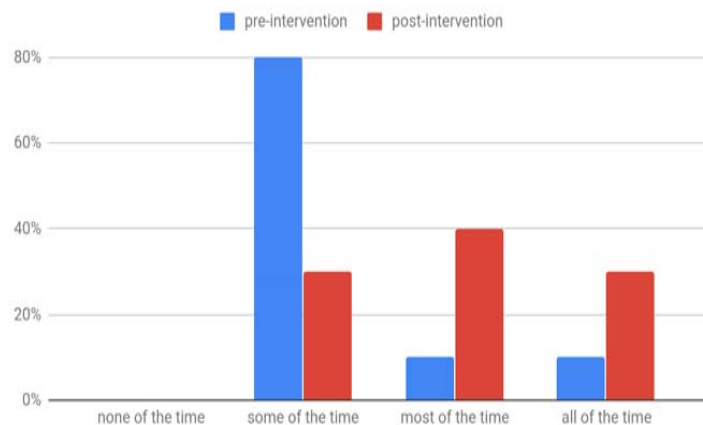
## Convergent Mixed Methods:

- Anonymous student surveys
- 6-week long intervention sessions
- Focus groups
- Student journals
- Classroom observations
- Staff interviews

# Findings

- Students' Self-Perception
  - overall increase among all students

When others are having a hard time, I'm kind and encouraging to them...



- Effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Intervention
  - Highly effective for students who qualify for special education services under OHI
    - decline in number of off-task behaviors
    - “In the beginning of the year, he was more spastic and talking more to peers around him. I can arguably say that that has improved.”
  - Little to no improvement for students who qualify for special education services under SLD and/or ID
    - slight decline in number of off-task behaviors for 3 students
    - no improvement/increase in number of off-task behaviors for 3 students



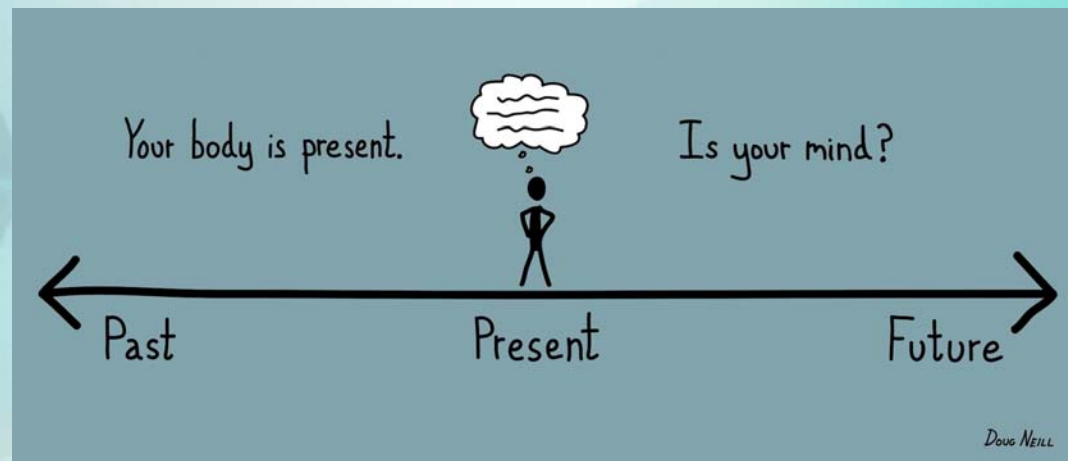
# Implications

- Importance of student mindset
  - growth vs fixed
  - student willingness to participate
- Mindfulness across all classroom settings
  - takes up as little as one minute of instructional time
  - little to no cost to implement mindfulness
  - consistency is key



# Thank you.

Questions?



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