Year 1: 2022-23

Plugged Into Mindfulness Evaluation Report – Mars Area SD

November 2022 - March 2023

Insight *with* *Joni*

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NORTH
OF THE PRESENT

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE PLUGGED INTO MINDFULNESS PROGRAM[1]

Joni Staaf Sturgill, founder of Healthy Body, Peaceful Soul, LLC, designed the Plugged Into Mindfulness program as a group training for adults. Intended to be implemented various group settings, the program proposed to support participants in learning mindfulness and breathwork techniques to promote health, particularly reducing stress and anxiety, preventing substance abuse, promoting emotion regulation, and improving adults' capacity to serve others in their employment role and share mindfulness practices with those they serve.

The program implementation described in this evaluation report includes programming funded through the Butler County Department of Drug and Alcohol.

In its grant application, Healthy Body, Peaceful Soul, LLC outlined the following benefits of mindfulness training:

- "Healthy coping skills
- Emotion regulation (learning a different way to relate to thoughts and feelings)
- Reduction in feelings of stress and anxiety
- Increase in compassion toward self and others
- Improved attention skills (focus as opposed to auto-pilot)"

Further, the grant application indicates such practices have measurable positive effects on the brain, related to decision making, impulse control, learning, memory, and addiction. It proposes that simple mindfulness practices can be integrated in daily life for long-lasting positive outcomes.

The program's grant application outlined the following performance objectives for education:

> "**Educators** who learn mindfulness not only reduce their own stress levels and minimize burnout, but are more attentive, empathetic, effective, and emotionally-regulated. In short, research shows that continued mindfulness training increases educator well-being and efficacy in the classroom, as well as prevents the use of substances.
>
> **Students** and those at-risk who learn mindfulness could reap the benefits of improved attention and focus, greater social-emotional skills, and a reduction in anxiety, stress, and depression, according to recent research. Additionally, those at-risk benefit from skills that promote non-judgmental awareness of the present moment (mindfulness). For example, mindfulness can prevent experiential avoidance, by interrupting the tendency to respond using maladaptive behaviors like substance abuse, and instead allow one to respond with awareness to sensations."

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[1] Program information from Plugged Into Mindfulness grant applications.

The program includes instruction, support, and resources for using mindfulness techniques and practices. Weekly auto-delivered emails reinforce sessions with mindfulness quotes, breathing exercises, or another reinforcement.

Learning outcomes were to include:

- Mindfulness & breathwork training
- Techniques for managing active and stressful thoughts and managing challenging emotions
- Research on mindfulness and substance abuse prevention
- Basic neuroscience of attention, stress, emotion, and mental health
- Practices that cultivate positivity, gratitude and compassion
- The role of mindfulness in communication and interaction
- How and when to offer different strategies and techniques to students
- How to facilitate mindfulness exercises in the classroom and one on one.
- Support for creating your own daily sitting practice
- Specific mindfulness assignments

The standard 10-hour program was designed to be implemented over 10, one-hour sessions with a trained instructor. Participants were afforded a mindfulness book recommendation that supported the training; an 80-page training manual, reading materials, and exercises in print and electronic form; mindfulness program videos; and for educators, a training kit that included age/grade-appropriate curricula, exercises, resources, evaluation tools, and library recommendations.

ABOUT HEALTHY BODY, PEACEFUL SOUL, LLC

The following passage was included in the program's grant applications to describe founder and leader Joni Staaf Sturgill's background and capacity to successfully deliver this program.

> "For 18 years, Joni [Staaf Sturgill], owner of Healthy Body Peaceful Soul, LLC and developer of Plugged Into Mindfulness, has been teaching stress management, using mindfulness, meditation, relaxation and yoga. She is a licensed professional counselor, nationally certified counselor, an advanced yoga/mindfulness educator (ERYT-500) has a Master of Science in Counseling Psychology, BA in Communications and also studied at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. Through her business, Joni shares insights on mental, emotional and physical wellness to corporate populations, cancer patients, therapists, educators, students of her training programs, and other various groups and individuals. Joni implemented her comprehensive Plugged Into Mindfulness Program at multiple school districts across Western Pennsylvania, as well as in counseling offices, health and human service centers, and medical facilities."

PLUGGED INTO MINDFULNESS EVALUATION DESIGN

Program evaluation is a process by which an intervention is examined to determine what happened. Such an examination may review the intervention's implementation, outcomes, or both. Evaluations

may be formative (studying the program's evolution while the program is happening) or summative (looking at the whole of the program after it concludes). Evaluations may also use a combination of methods to comprehensively examine the program from different approaches and perspectives.

Program evaluation differs from research, though there may be similarities or overlap.[2] Research typically employs, to some extent, experimental design and is primarily concerned with testing a theory or contributing to general knowledge, while evaluation is focused on a particular program in its applied circumstances. Program evaluation is typically called for as an accountability process in grant-funded programs to determine the extent to which a program happened, what result was achieved, and what could be done better or differently next time. Evaluation is about determining the *value* of an effort.

In its funded grant application, the program implementer budgeted for an external evaluation of the program. An external evaluation has some advantages over managing evaluation and accountability internally, such as perspective and distance from the program that add objectivity, additional capacity for data management and analysis; potential staff time savings as accountability needs are addressed by external resources, reduction in burden on program staff who should be more focused on implementation, and consultant support for program leaders, among other benefits.

While Plugged Into Mindfulness has been implemented and evaluated in the past, this iteration of the program was the first year that North of the Present conducted the evaluation. Healthy Body, Peaceful Soul, LLC engaged the services of North of the Present, LLC to serve as the external contracted program evaluator. This evaluation report is a product of that engagement. Leslie McConnell, Founder and President led the evaluation. Ms. McConnell has evaluated grant-funded educational programs for more than 20 years, specializing in supplemental education programs that support adult and youth learners. These programs have focused on children and youth of all ages, teacher professional learning, parent programming, and community impact. Ms. McConnell earned her Master of Science in Educational Foundations with a focus on program evaluation from Duquesne University and a Bachelor of Arts in Professional Writing from La Roche University. She is a recent Fellow of the Education Policy and Leadership Center[3] and has completed a variety of post-graduate program evaluation courses through The Evaluators Institute[4].

The evaluation design for Plugged Into Mindfulness is based on the grant applications supporting the program's operation as well as program implementer interests. This evaluation model was intended to examine the program's implementation and results of this program cycle. Future reports will include comparisons from this year against the future years. Because of differences in methodology, results from this report are not comparable to those found in reports produced by other evaluators.

While the evaluation takes a summative approach to each program year, each program year's evaluation can serve as a formative guide for future iterations or other initiatives.

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[2] Rogers, P. (2014), "Week 19: Ways of framing the difference between research and evaluation." Better Evaluation. Retrieved from
https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/blog/framing_the_difference_between_research_and_evaluation
[3] https://www.eplc.org/
[4] https://tei.cgu.edu/

Four primary evaluation questions guided this inquiry:
1. *To what extent was the program **implemented as designed**?*
2. *To what extent did the program realize positive changes in practice related to the program's identified goals and purposes? To what extent did participants change what they **do**?*
3. *To what extent did the program influence positive **outcomes** for participants (adults and youth), particularly outcomes identified in performance objectives? Are there differences in results for some subgroups?*
4. *How might we **improve** upon this program for future iterations and expansions?*

These questions and the program's grant objectives guided the evaluation design. The Evaluation Plan developed identified that the primary intents of the program are to reduce stress and minimize burnout of participants; support adult participants in more effectively serving their constituents; and improve participants' social/emotional skills; and improve participant focus.

Table 1 outlines the inquiry alignment between the performance elements and data collection and analysis.

Table 1. Evaluation Design – Performance Alignment.

Performance Element What is to be achieved?	Data Collection, Analysis, and Timeline What evidence will we collect?
The Plugged Into Mindfulness program will be implemented as designed.	Program schedule/calendar of sessions, participant attendance records, program curriculum, program content samples/examples, implementer feedback/reflections, participant demographics (for results context)
Participants will demonstrate new learning.	Participant survey feedback on strategies, tools, and practices used; level of participant integration/employment of new approaches
Participants will exhibit positive results during or after participation, such as: • Reduced stress/anxiety • Increased efficacy • Improved ability to manage emotions/support positive emotional response; emotional regulation • Feelings of empowerment • Increased capacity to support/serve others • Improved outlook on life • Increased compassion for others • Improved focus • Reduction in substance use/abuse • Positive personal performance • Increased self-awareness • Improved self-care • Other benefits	Participant survey (adult and student) feedback related to and reflection on their implementation of new learning, analysis and comparison of pre/post instruments, post-only reflective instruments, educator observation responses related to student outcomes (groups with and without student direct instruction) NOTE: Student surveys at the elementary level will be limited to just a few very simple questions (likely Yes/No, limited answer/response). As students under age 10 are generally still learning to read, their comprehension is limited results are typically unreliable. Elementary student surveys have value and can contribute meaningful information when used with other data sources, but only when limitations are considered.
Program leaders will make informed decisions about the program's future, including revisions, replications, iterations, expansions, etc.	Program leadership/implementer reflections, curriculum and instruction adjustments, program shifts, new options, future plans

Data collection instruments, sources, and protocols were to include:

- Pre/post instrument using the Five Facets of Mindfulness Questionnaire[5] (abbreviated) as its core and supplemented with additional program-specific questions;
- Brief implementer session reflection survey;
- Program attendance records [implementer managed];
- Program content and implementation details [implementer provided]; and
- Other data sources identified throughout the program.

The evaluation was to be both formative (occurring during and informing the evolution of the program) as well as summative (occurring after implementation concludes and reflecting on the whole implementation term. Data analysis was to include quantitative and qualitative data, summary and descriptive statistics (counts and variance), pre/post comparisons, year-over-year comparisons/growth/decline [starting in Year 2], reflections, and other methods identified as appropriate during the evaluation term based on the volume and quality of data available.

This report addresses programming that occurred from November 2022 through June 2023. This period is considered Year 1 of a two-year program cycle.

While this program has been evaluated in the past, this evaluation report cannot be directly compared or contrasted as it is unknown the extent to which the methods used by the previous evaluator align with those of the current evaluator.

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[5] https://novopsych.com.au/assessments/formulation/five-facet-mindfulness-questionnaire-ffmq-15/

FINDINGS

Evaluation findings shared in this report include information and results of data analysis from program and participant sources from November 2022 through March 2023. This cycle of Plugged Into Mindfulness was funded by grant funds through the Butler County Department of Health and Human Services.

IMPLEMENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

This section of the report answers the evaluation question: *To what extent was the program implemented as designed?*

Plugged Into Mindfulness engaged 34 participants from [Mars Area School District](#) ("Mars"), a Butler County K-12 public school district. Twenty-nine participants (85%) were engaged on an ongoing basis and five participants who started the program dropped out early, having attended only one session. This report will focus on the 29 participants engaged on an ongoing basis.

Mars' 10-hour program was implemented as five in-person sessions of two hours each from November 2022 through March 2023. All participants were new to the program.

Participant attendance was examined for all participants based on the number of sessions attended compared to the number of sessions offered. Participation rates of 50% or less were considered "low" participation; rates greater than 50% through 79% were considered "medium" participation; and participation of 80% through 100% was considered "high" participation. It is worth noting that in this cycle, all "low" participation individuals had participation rates of 40% or less.

Nearly half of participants attended at rates of 80% or more (45% of participants). Nearly a quarter (24%) were categorized as having "medium" participation. Thirty-one percent (31%) of participants attended 40% of the sessions.
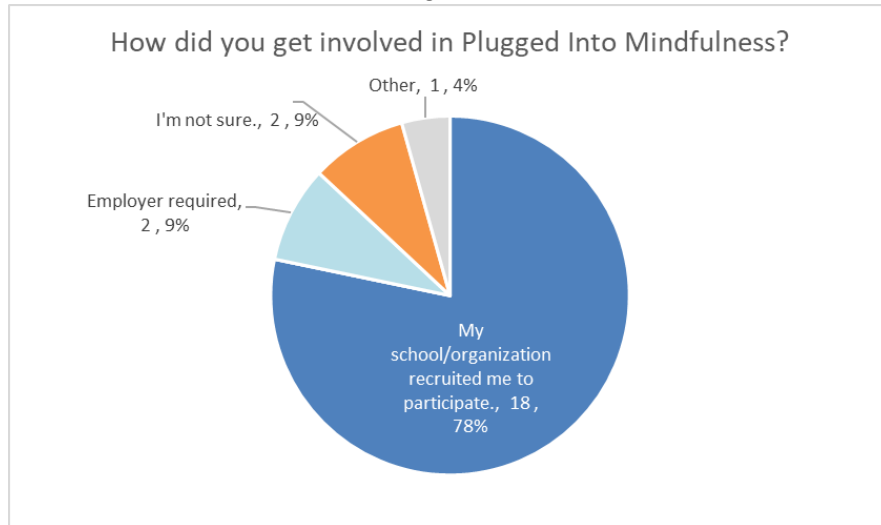
Figure 1.

Mars Attendance Rate

Low, 9 , 31%
High, 13 , 45%
Medium, 7 , 24%
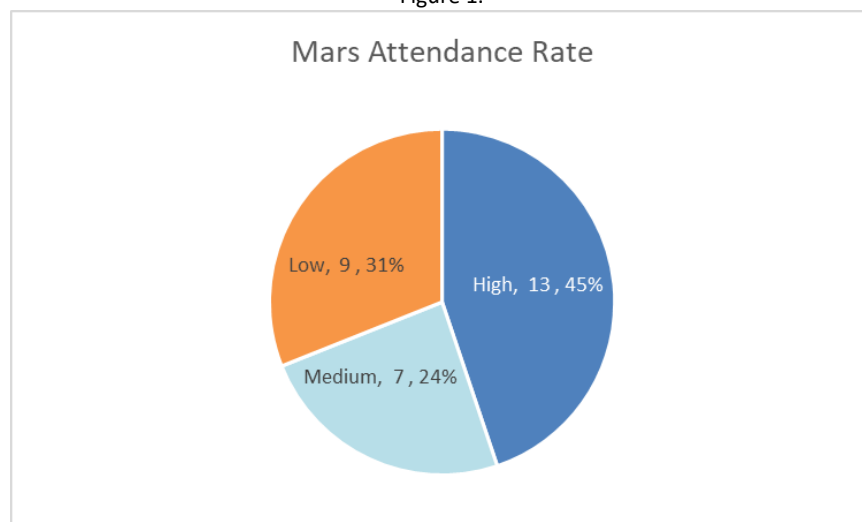
Data was collected through the pre-program survey about participants' program engagement circumstances and experience in their professional field; 23 of the 29 Mars participants completed the PRE instrument.

Mars participants completing the PRE survey indicated that they were mostly recruited by their school to participate (78%).

Figure 2.

How did you get involved in Plugged Into Mindfulness?

- Other, 1, 4%
- I'm not sure., 2, 9%
- Employer required, 2, 9%
- My school/organization recruited me to participate., 18, 78%

Of the 23 respondents, only four indicated any previous formal program experience related to mindfulness or social-emotional learning.

Figure 3.
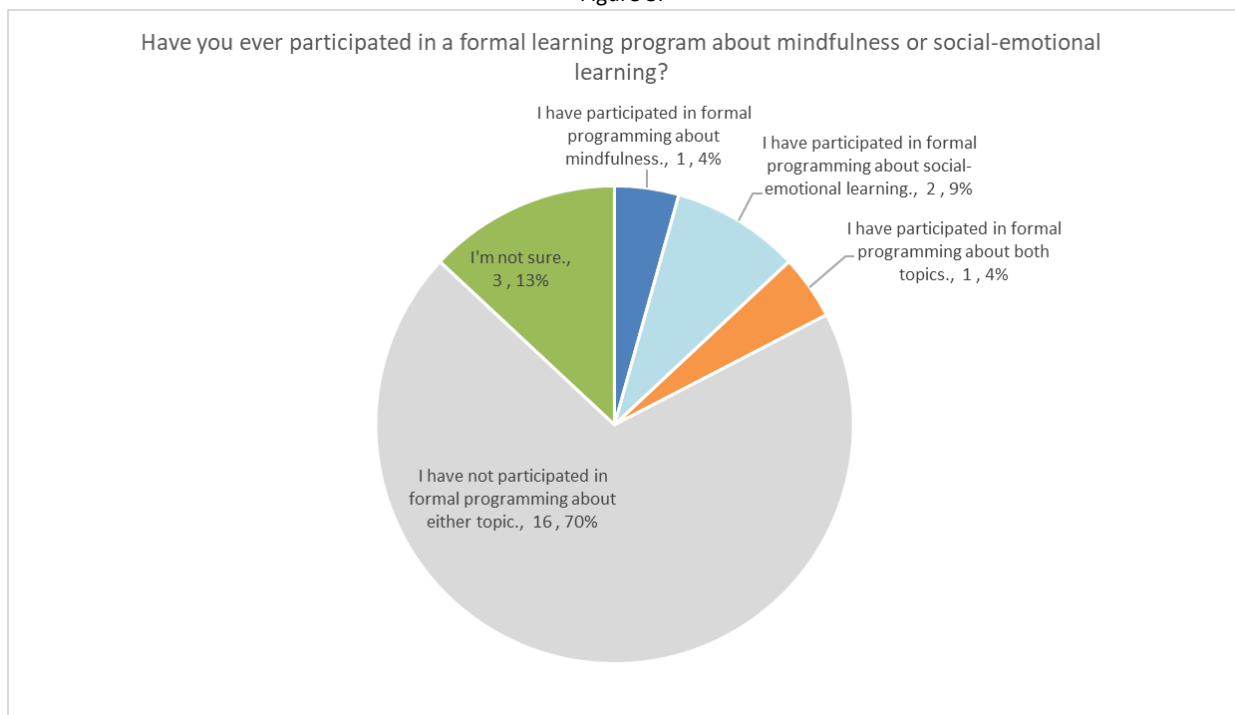
Have you ever participated in a formal learning program about mindfulness or social-emotional learning?

- I have participated in formal programming about mindfulness., 1, 4%
- I have participated in formal programming about social-emotional learning., 2, 9%
- I have participated in formal programming about both topics., 1, 4%
- I'm not sure., 3, 13%
- I have not participated in formal programming about either topic., 16, 70%

This program was exclusively for adults in Mars Area School District; no students received direct instruction from the program but they may have received program-informed programming from the adult participants. The extent to which this occurred is not known.

IMPLEMENTER SESSION REFLECTIONS

To capture information from the implementer perspective, the evaluator created a very brief session reflection survey. Session reflections were completed for four of the five sessions.

The first element examined was participant engagement. On a scale from completely disengaged (0) to highly engaged (5), the implementer rated one session 5, one session 4, and two sessions 3 on the five-point scale. Comments indicated that sessions were mixed in terms of engagement and challenges, although one session was described as "one of the best I've had."

The survey asked the implementer what, if any, changes or adjustments were made to the session and/or any additional commentary was relevant. Implementer comments indicated that virtual session engagement was lower than in-person session and that despite the sessions being longer, participants were interested and engaged. Comments indicated engagement was particularly high for the initial session and then decreased for future sessions.

RESULTS & OUTCOMES

Plugged Into Mindfulness used an established instrument, the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ-15), to examine program results. Together, the program leadership and the evaluator coupled this established instrument with additional questions designed specifically for Plugged Into Mindfulness to examine elements unique to the program, investigate specific interest areas, and to add context to results. The instrument, in the form of a survey, was administered to participants at the beginning of and ends of the program in a pre/post fashion.

This section of the report addresses the evaluation questions:

1. *To what extent did the program realize positive changes in practice related to the program's identified goals and purposes? To what extent did participants change what they **do**?*
2. *To what extent did the program influence positive **outcomes** for participants (adults and youth), particularly outcomes identified in performance objectives? Are there differences in results for some subgroups?*

Of the 29 ongoing participants, 23 completed the PRE instrument (79%), 11 (38%) completed the POST instrument, nine (31%) completed both the PRE and POST instruments, and four completed neither instrument. Participants received several reminders about completing the instruments.

The PRE/POST comparison will share information about how individuals may have changed over the course of the program.

Table 2. PRE/POST Completion.

Entity	Completing the PRE		Completed the POST		Completed Both PRE & POST	
	#	% of all	#	% of all	#	% of all
Mars	23	79%	11	38%	9	31%

PRE/POST Comparison

The evaluator collected PRE/POST data and matched each PRE response to its corresponding POST response, where matches could be made.

For some statements, positive improvement meant a response that was more true at POST than on the PRE. For other statements, the converse was true. As such, each statement was examined and considered individually. Of the 15 statements, eight statements were identified as "more true = improved" and seven statements were identified as "less true = improved."

It is important to note that small numbers of individuals may result in potentially misleading graphical representations. The number of individuals included in the group should always be considered when interpreting results.

Overall Change

The evaluator examined overall change from PRE to POST for all individuals who completed both instruments. In order to look at whether an individual improved overall, experienced no change, or exhibited a decline overall, the evaluator converted change designations to scores. If a respondent improved their response on an individual statement – they selected a more desirable response at the POST administration than they had previously – then they were assigned a score of 1. If the converse of this was true, they selected a less desirable response at the POST administration than they had previously – then they were assigned a score of -1. If they selected the same response for an item at both PRE and POST, they were assigned a score of 0.

These scores were then totaled to determine a net total change for all statements together. Individuals were then classified in three potential change categories:

- Individuals with a net zero total either selected the exact same responses on the PRE and POST, or, they improved on the same number of items as they declined.
- Individuals with a net improvement improved on all responses – meaning they selected all more desirable responses, or they improved on more measures than they declined or selected the same response from the PRE to the POST.
- Individuals with a net decline declined on all responses – meaning they selected all less desirable responses, or they declined on more measures than they improved or selected the same response from the PRE to the POST.

It should be noted that no one selected all the same responses on both administrations and no one declined on all statements.

Of the nine individuals with both PRE and POST data, five (56%) exhibited a positive change, or a net improvement, from PRE to POST, indicating that they selected more desirable responses at the POST administration than they had on the PRE administration. Four individuals (44%) experienced a net decline.

Figure 4.
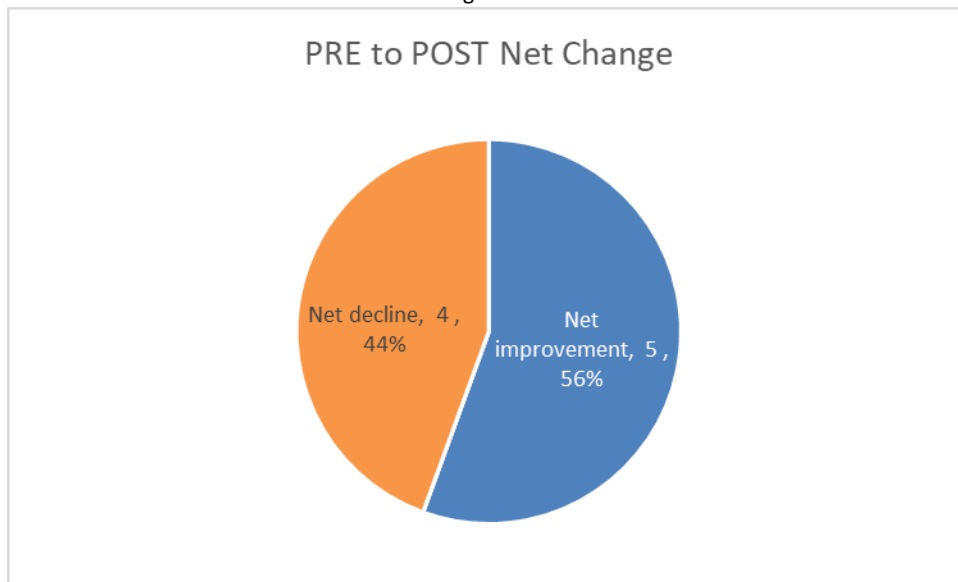
Even with respondents showing a net decline, all but one respondent improved to some extent on some measures. Of the nine respondents, eight improved in some way, reporting more desirable responses at POST on between two and 10 of the 15 statements (average 6.25 statements).

Respondents selected the same response on two to 10 statements, with an average of 6.4 statements.

Two of the nine respondents **did not decline on any statements;** of the seven remaining, they declined on between two and eight statements (average 3.9) of the 15 PRE/POST measures.

These results indicate that the program contributed to overall positive change to some extent for most participants. Several respondents showed a net improvement, nearly all respondents improved on some measures, and the average number of statements improved (6.25) outnumbers the average number of statements with a decline (3.9).

Individual Measure Improvement

The evaluator also examined change on each statement separately.

Most statements trended toward improvement, though the extent to which this occurred varied for each statement. This indicates that **in many domains, the program likely had a positive influence on**

participant outcomes. However, the small group sizes make it difficult to generalize these results. Additional data and a larger population size would add strength to the results.

Here are the statements in descending order of improved percentage.

Table 3. Individual Measure Results.

Statement	Improved %	No Change %	Declined %
When I take a shower or a bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.	55.6%	22.2%	22.2%
I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling.	55.6%	22.2%	22.2%
When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting.	55.6%	44.4%	0.0%
I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face.	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%
Even when I'm feeling terribly upset I can find a way to put it into words.	44.4%	33.3%	22.2%
I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them.	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%
When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%
I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings.	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%
I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions.	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%
I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things.	33.3%	44.4%	22.2%
When I have distressing thoughts or images I just notice them and let them go.	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing.	22.2%	44.4%	33.3%
I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.	11.1%	55.6%	33.3%

Other POST-Program Results

The findings shared in this section reflect all individuals who completed a POST survey (11 individuals from Mars).

A series of follow-up statements asked respondents to consider the extent to which the program contributed to positive changes and new learning and practices. **Overall, 100% of respondents indicated that to some extent, they learned new stress and anxiety management techniques that work for them; their self-awareness increased; and they now know different strategies to use in different circumstances.** Figures 5 and 6 illustrate further learning outcome details.
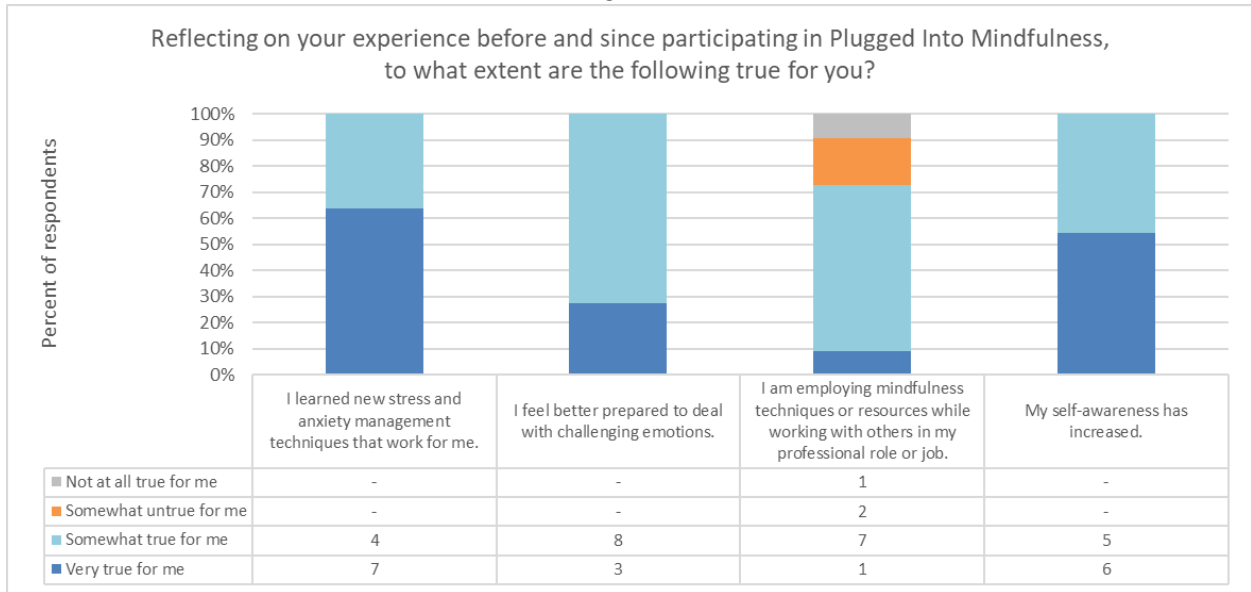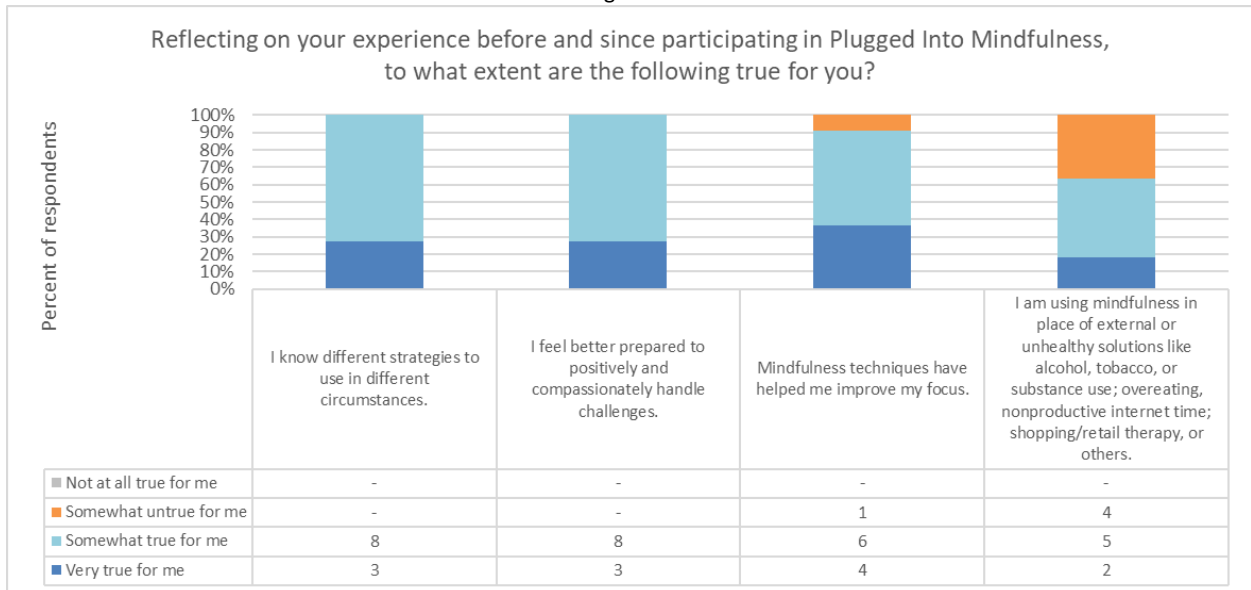
Figure 5.

Reflecting on your experience before and since participating in Plugged Into Mindfulness, to what extent are the following true for you?

	I learned new stress and anxiety management techniques that work for me.	I feel better prepared to deal with challenging emotions.	I am employing mindfulness techniques or resources while working with others in my professional role or job.	My self-awareness has increased.
■ Not at all true for me	-	-	1	-
■ Somewhat untrue for me	-	-	2	-
■ Somewhat true for me	4	8	7	5
■ Very true for me	7	3	1	6

Figure 6.

Reflecting on your experience before and since participating in Plugged Into Mindfulness, to what extent are the following true for you?

	I know different strategies to use in different circumstances.	I feel better prepared to positively and compassionately handle challenges.	Mindfulness techniques have helped me improve my focus.	I am using mindfulness in place of external or unhealthy solutions like alcohol, tobacco, or substance use; overeating, nonproductive internet time; shopping/retail therapy, or others.
■ Not at all true for me	-	-	-	-
■ Somewhat untrue for me	-	-	1	4
■ Somewhat true for me	8	8	6	5
■ Very true for me	3	3	4	2

The POST survey also asked participants to share the extent to which they felt more or less confident using mindfulness as a strategy. All indicated that they felt more comfortable to some extent using mindfulness as a strategy, with 30% indicating "significantly more confident."

Figure 7.

How would you describe the difference that the Plugged Into Mindfulness has made related to your confidence using mindfulness as a strategy?

Significantly more confident using mindfulness as a strategy, 3 , 30%

Slightly more confident using mindfulness as a strategy, 7 , 70%
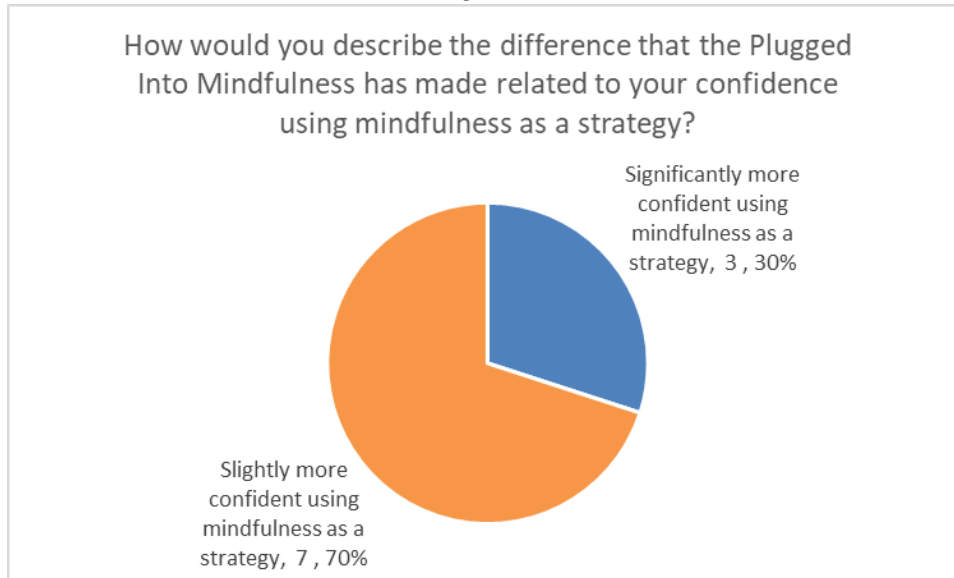
To get a sense of changes in practice, the POST survey asked participants to reflect back on their practice before Plugged Into Mindfulness and share the frequency with which they employed mindfulness techniques. One respondent indicated that they used mindfulness "daily or almost daily;" one indicated "occasionally / several times a month;" 55% indicated "rarely / once or twice a month'" and 27% indicated they never used such practices. Post-program, respondents as a whole indicated greater frequency, with none indicating "never" and 55% indicating "frequently / more than once a week."

Figure 8.

BEFORE participating in Plugged Into Mindfulness, how often do you think you used mindfulness techniques?

Daily or almost daily, 1 , 9%

Occasionally / several times a month, 1 , 9%

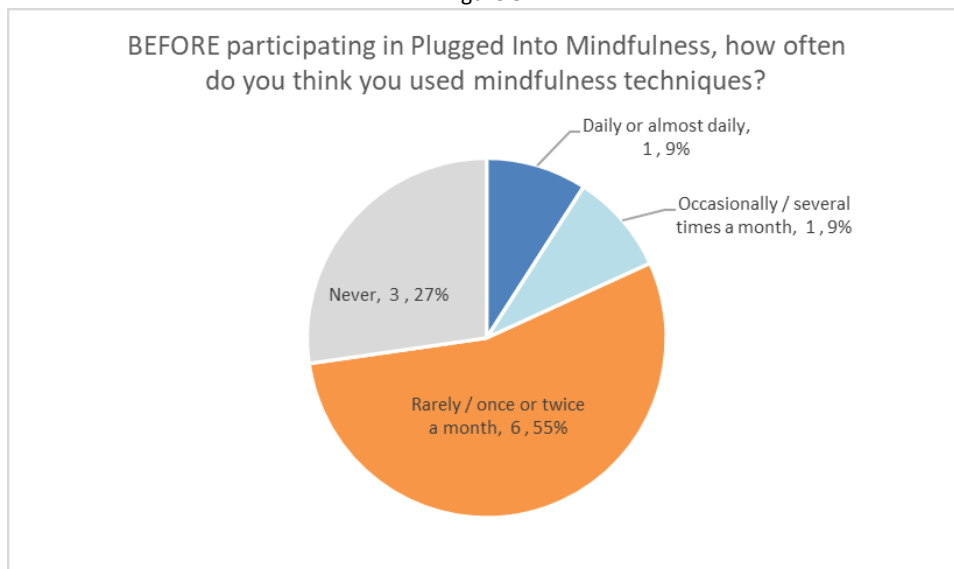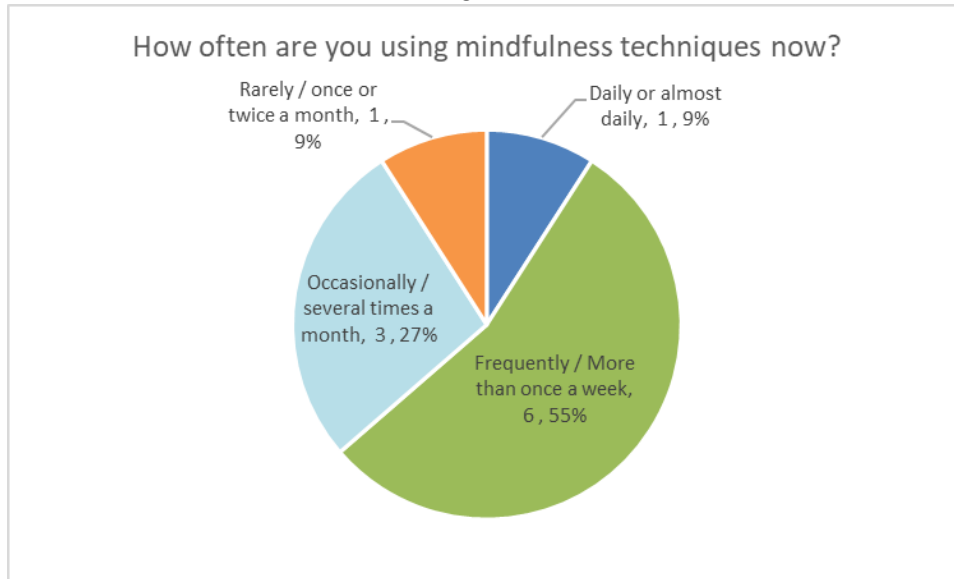Never, 3 , 27%

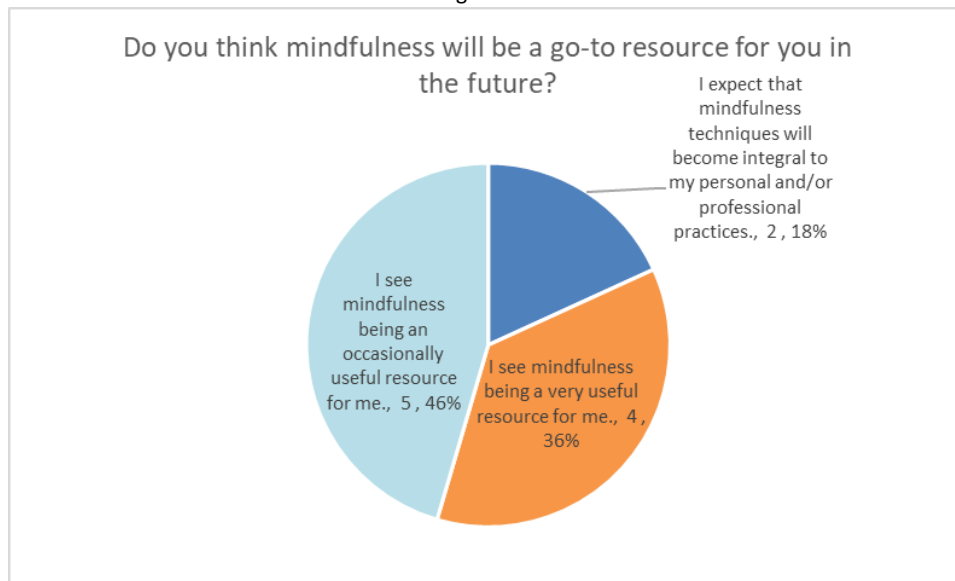Rarely / once or twice a month, 6 , 55%

Figure 9.

When asked whether mindfulness might be a go-to resource in the future, 55% shared that they thought mindfulness would be an integral or useful resource; 46% indicated that they thought mindfulness would be an occasional resource for them.

Figure 10.

All 11 respondents found the instructor to be "very helpful."

The post-program survey asked participants to share feedback about their experience that might be used or considered in future program adjustments, extensions, or services.
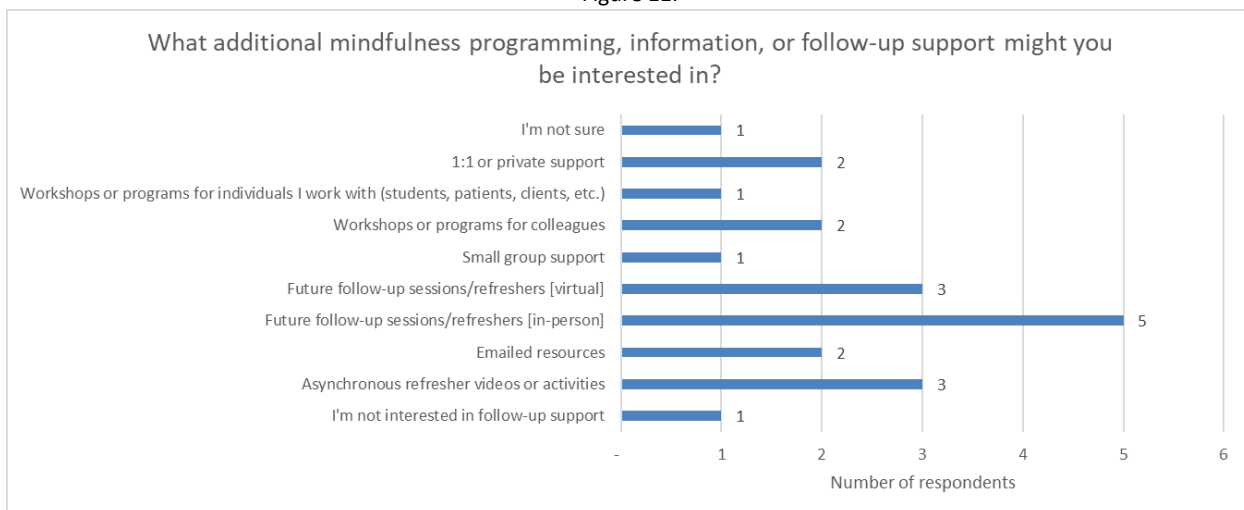
Asked about the most helpful or useful techniques, activities, practices, or resources they learned from the program, all respondents to the POST survey shared a response. Breathing techniques and exercises were among the top responses. Other most-helpful elements shared included, in no particular order:

- Awareness
- Body scan
- Communication practices
- Gratitude
- Mindful speaking and listening
- "In the moment" strategies
- Positive thought focus
- "Understanding how to let go of the issues that swarm in your brain and just 'be'."
- "I am practicing quieting my mind and breathing. I am taking more time to just pause; some of this training has been very difficult for me, but I am committed to working on it!"

56% of respondents showed a net improvement from PRE to POST, with 89% of respondents improving on some measures

The evaluator asked what additional mindfulness programming, information, or follow-up support participants wanted. Ten of 11 respondents indicated interest in continuing support, which included the greatest interest in future in-person follow up sessions (5 respondents), among others.

Figure 11.

What additional mindfulness programming, information, or follow-up support might you be interested in?

Category	Number of respondents
I'm not sure	1
1:1 or private support	2
Workshops or programs for individuals I work with (students, patients, clients, etc.)	1
Workshops or programs for colleagues	2
Small group support	1
Future follow-up sessions/refreshers [virtual]	3
Future follow-up sessions/refreshers [in-person]	5
Emailed resources	2
Asynchronous refresher videos or activities	3
I'm not interested in follow-up support	1

Recommending the program to others was considered as a measure of program relevance and utility. Participants were asked to rate how likely they were to recommend Plugged Into Mindfulness to others.

The scale started at zero for "not at all likely" and ended at six, "very likely," with the midpoint, three, being "somewhat likely." Respondents could select any option on the 0-6 scale. Eighty-one percent (81%) selected the three highest options on the scale; two indicated 6 on the 6-point scale, three selected 5 of 6, and four selected 4 of 6. Two respondents indicated they were "somewhat likely (3)" to recommend the program.

When asked for suggestions, additions, or revisions that might be considered, about half of respondents shared a comment, which included the following, in respondents' own words.

- "If the goal is teachers helping students practice mindfulness, more explicit strategies on how to introduce it effectively would be helpful."
- "10 hours may be too much, it could have been equally as productive for teachers to have 5 hours. If Mindfulness is to be taught to students, then additional training would be necessary."
- "Continue to develop and build on the practices that were started in phase 1."
- "It should be an optional program for those interested."

At the end of the POST survey, the evaluator provided an optional space for respondents to share anything else that they thought the program or the evaluator should know about their experience. Most of respondents left the space blank or indicated that they had nothing further to share. Three respondents shared a substantive comment.

- "It was a good experience overall and I am very grateful the district providing it."
- "Joni was awesome; her knowledge and ability to communicate and teach were perfect! I am glad I had the opportunity to participate in the program!"
- "The instructor did a nice job of encouraging practices but not being 'too pushy.'"

100%
of post-program respondents indicated that they feel more confident using mindfulness as a strategy

REFLECTIONS, CONSIDERATIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluator shares the following reflections and suggestions based on data collection and analysis, interpretations and anecdotes, and other information considered throughout the program term. The evaluator offers these recommendations understanding that it may not be possible to address all of them. Changes may not be possible at all, or they may be delayed. However, including all generated recommendations provides an opportunity for conversation, exploration, documentation, and as part of a cycle of continuous improvement.

In general, findings and feedback from this report should be used to make informed decisions about if, how, and where program development efforts might be concentrated.

This section of the report addresses the evaluation question: *How might we **improve** upon this program for future iterations and expansions?*

- The program was delivered to the entities and groups proposed in its grant application. The program intended to serve up to 30 educators per school. The program ultimately engaged 29 educators in ongoing instruction from Mars Area School District.

Recommendation: If the program wishes to increase participation in certain groups, it might consider exploring the reasons that some individuals dropped out early in the program and then designing program elements or promoting existing program elements to address those reasons, where appropriate. Successful programs and ventures are those that identify and successfully fill a need for their audience. It may be helpful to identify the "problems" that the program helps participants solve, which may differ from group to group. Messaging, recruitment, and marketing efforts may need to be adjusted depending on the audience to connect with participants who could benefit most. This includes the individuals as well as the participant entities. Further, discussions with the participating entities about increasing engagement might also yield additional insights or engagement.

- Based on whole-group POST survey results, most participants shared that they are using mindfulness more frequently than they had previously or they were continuing to use such strategies regularly. Furthermore, participants indicated an interest in continuing to learn about mindfulness. This indicates that the program was successful in increasing awareness and promoting the behaviors and interest it intended in its grant applications. Further, this also indicates that participants experienced positive changes in practice as a result of the program, if they are seeing enough results to warrant continued interest.

Recommendation: Continue offering the program while also considering additions, revisions, and tweaks from respondent surveys, as these give insight to the needs, interests, and experience of the end user. Being able to address participant needs directly – and demonstrate same – will add to program sustainability. POST survey results indicated the greatest interest in emailed resources, future virtual follow-up sessions, and asynchronous refresher videos or activities.

- Matched PRE/POST results indicate positive results for most participants overall and at the item analysis level. Small subgroup counts make it difficult to draw conclusions, despite the overall positive trends.

Recommendation: The evaluator and program leaders should collaborate to identify methods of increasing the response rate to both the PRE and POST instruments. Increasing the population size included in the data will also add strength to the results. The second year of this program cycle will likely add insights. Additional reinforcement or follow-up might support an increased response rate. Further, once the population size is increased, additional insight might be gleaned from breaking out the highest value "same" responses as an additional result group, "did not need to improve" or "highest value at both administrations."

- The first year of a program cycle and a new evaluation are naturally a learning process for all. The evaluation and the program could be strengthened overall by greater responses rates, additional feedback from stakeholders, and potentially other elements.

Recommendation: The evaluator and program leadership might find it helpful to establish a more definitive calendar of sessions and data collection time points to better understand, manage, and reinforce data collection and survey completion. Continuing to collect, analyze, and interpret data, and refine the processes by which data are collected should yield increasingly more useful information.

- Participant gains and feedback may be useful from promotional and program development perspectives.

Recommendation: De-identified feedback might be used as a tool to encourage and support future participants. Program leadership and the evaluator might collaborate to identify those elements particularly motivating for potential and future participants. Additional services or program opportunities might include follow-up workshop series (virtual and/or in person), emailed resources, individual or small group coaching (virtual and/or in person), entity consulting on supporting an organization culture that encourages mindfulness, mindfulness in leadership trainings, additional direct student instruction, and additional instruction or support for educators for implementing mindfulness with their students.

The evaluation of the Plugged Into Mindfulness program is intended to address grant accountability expectations while also supporting the program's leadership to identify, prioritize, and address program and participant needs in order improve future program iterations. Results are based on the data collected and analyzed for this evaluation as provided by the program, its implementers, and participants as of the date of this report's production. The results of this evaluation may also be useful for other groups seeking to solve similar problems and serve the needs of similar individuals; policy makers; government agencies; and others.

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