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SUPPORTING THE ENTIRE SYSTEM: REDUCING EDUCATORS BURNOUT WITH MINDFULNESS-BASED PRACTICE AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Educators take on an important role in educating our youth. However, the job of an educator comes with many stressors. Coronavirus, commonly referred to as COVID-19, presented new challenges for educators and students requiring most schools to change from in-person to online instruction seemingly overnight. These increased, constant stressors can lead to job burnout. Burnout results in nearly 50% of educators leaving the education field within their first 5 years costing the U.S. nearly 2 billion dollars annually in turnover expenses. Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBIs), eight-week programs of daily mindfulness training, have been successful in reducing burnout and stress among various populations. An eight-week long program, however, can impose various cost and time barriers for many people, especially busy educators, inhibiting their ability to benefit from MBI programs. The purpose of this research was to develop a brief mindfulness training for educators. Over 230 educators attended two, one-hour, online mindfulness training sessions. Some of the educators (67) completed pre and post questionnaires assessing stress scores, burnout levels, demographics, mindfulness awareness, and more from established measures. One month after the brief MBI, around 20 educators participated in a focus group to further understand educators' stressors and support systems. Pre and post data were analyzed indicating a significant decrease in educator stress. Though other measures were not significant, the data gave valuable insight into Utah educator stress and burnout levels during COVID-19. Further, stress levels were higher in educators with less than 5 years of service than those with more than 5 years of service. The research team continues to explore systematic approaches to brief MBIs to increase stress and burnout reduction, including the creation of a mindfulness checklist for educators to complete daily for 2-8 weeks after completing a brief MBI as well as implementing mindfulness schoolwide. The results from this brief mindfulness-based intervention increased insight into educator burnout levels and the need for intervention; further, the research encourages more research on educator burnout levels and how to increase the effectiveness of brief MBIs in reducing burnout.