

Mindful Staff in Austin Independent School District

2018–2019

Who are the mindful staff of AISD?

In 2018–2019, 222 staff members attended at least one professional development session on mindfulness. Sessions were led by the district’s mindfulness specialist, James Butler, and were tailored for teachers of different levels (i.e., elementary and secondary) as well as for non-teaching staff, such as librarians, counselors, principals, and district-level administrators. These staff members represented more than 100 different worksites, most of which were campuses. The campus-based participants were more likely to come from Title I schools than from non-Title I schools, and they were more likely to come from schools that did not participate in the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Seed Model Program in 2018–2019 than from schools that did participate. This indicates that staff from schools with traditionally lower levels of SEL implementation are seeking opportunities to participate in more SEL professional development opportunities.

What did staff report about their personal and professional mindfulness practices?

All staff who participated in a mindfulness training session were invited to subscribe to the district’s monthly mindfulness newsletter, and at the end of the school year, subscribers were asked to complete a survey about their personal and professional mindfulness practices. More than 200 people responded to the survey, 170 of whom provided identification that could be linked with district demographic data.

Analysis of survey results revealed a significant relationship between self-reported personal mindfulness practices and professional mindfulness practices, such that the more frequently staff members practiced mindfulness on their own, the more likely they were to practice at work ($r = 0.51, p < .001$). Participants’ open-ended responses to the survey question “What advice do you have for new teachers or schools interested in implementing mindfulness?” corroborated this finding, as many staff suggested that peers practice mindfulness on their own before implementing mindfulness in the classroom or office. For example, one staff member recommended, “Develop a personal practice, so it comes from a genuine place,” and another opined, “Practice what you preach.”

Another noteworthy finding from the survey was that participants responded differently based on their amount of professional work experience. Specifically, those with more years of work experience reported more frequent professional mindfulness practice than did staff with fewer years of work experience (Figure 1). One possible



explanation for this finding is that employees with more experience felt they had more autonomy to incorporate mindfulness into their professions. Interestingly, years of professional work experience was not related to the frequency of personal practice or the perceived helpfulness of mindfulness.

Figure 1.

Staff with more professional experience practiced mindfulness in the workplace more frequently than did staff with less professional experience.



Source. Survey emailed to newsletter subscribers, May 2019

Note. Survey respondents were divided into quartiles based on years of professional work experience. Those in the top quartile had 17 or more years of professional experience, while those in the bottom quartile had 5 or fewer years of work experience.

*The difference between more experienced staff and less experienced staff was statistically significant, $t(93) = 2.35, p < .05$.

What additional opportunities exist for mindful staff?

Austin Independent School District’s (AISD) mindfulness specialist continues to publish a monthly newsletter with suggestions for personal practice and classroom implementation, as well as highlights of students’ and staff’s mindfulness practices. Three levels of mindfulness training (101, 201, and 301) are available in 2019–2020 to any AISD staff who have completed the prerequisite professional development course, Isolating Race. Additionally, in Spring 2020, select teachers will have the opportunity to join a mindfulness cohort that will co-teach mindfulness to other teachers. Aside from these AISD opportunities, staff have access to free, lifetime subscriptions to web-based applications that offer a variety of mindfulness tools to use at home and in the classroom.

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