

## Final Report for Teacher and Student Learning Yoga Team with Barbara Beyerbach

### Project SMART Topics in Education: Social Emotional Learning in High Needs Schools

**Teacher Participant Name: Alicia Mitchelson at CARE Program with Oswego High School**

#### **Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:**

Alicia Mitchelson: The first half of the school year was dedicated to working with teenagers at the Alternative Education Program (CITI CARE Program). I collaborated with Dr. Roshmi Mishra in collecting data on my teaching of mindfulness and yoga by incorporating writing, art, and reflection in my weekly sessions with the students to help fulfil her dissertation. The second half of the school year was dedicated to mindfulness and yoga for teachers and faculty at Oswego High School.

#### **Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning:** We examined our written reflections and found the following:

This part is dedicated to the 14 weeks I spent teaching yoga and mindfulness to teachers and staff at Oswego High School. Teachers and staff have a lot to deal with on a day-to-day basis. The offering of my sessions allowed the teachers to take time for themselves right after school. It was extremely convenient located right inside of the High School, and attendance was high. Ranging anywhere from five-twenty OHS staff. This work is important because teachers work under enormous pressure. This practice allows them to slow down, savor the breath, and focus on the present moment; to de-stress before heading home to their families/home life. The staff was extremely grateful to have this opportunity to work with me, and are looking forward to having more yoga in the upcoming school year.

The 14-week series was two weekly hour-long sessions held after school at Oswego High School. A lot of the teachers coming were NEW to yoga, and left craving more.

The mindfulness and yoga sessions allows a path for teachers to relax, love themselves, regain energy from the feeling of being “burnt out”, and to let go. As one teacher put it, “Even on days when I was super busy or tired and didn’t want to go, I felt refreshed and calmer when I left, and was glad I decided to go.” A common theme from teachers was the business of their days and schedules. Another teacher stated, “Yoga has taught me that no matter how busy I am, I need to take the time for myself to help me to become more centered on a daily basis. Yoga gives me an overall feeling of health!”

The sessions started with breathing exercises, warm ups, and a common theme for the day. I would always ask the staff what they would prefer to work on, and go from there. Ending with a deep relaxation each session leaving them feeling nourished, energized and ready to go home with positivity, and peace. spoke with teachers in person, and via email of the importance yoga and mindfulness had on them during the weekly sessions that I met with them. I also gave out an evaluation form that will be attached to show all positive feedback Project Smart received from the grateful teachers and staff at OHS.

Yoga also brought about a sense of community within the school. One teacher stated, “Yoga also created a feeling of community with my colleagues that participated. There are many people in the building that I work with, that I don't see during the day. It was a great way to bring our OHS community together. I found myself talking to colleagues in the hall about the previous day's yoga practice, and talking about excitement for the next class.”

#### **Analysis of Data on Student Learning:**

Teachers reported feeling calmer, more energized, and less reactive with students. See attached surveys of OHS teachers.

Students in the CARE program reported less stress and more focus on pre/post assessments (see Rosh's data) and also articulated what was going on inside them physically, emotionally and mentally through reflective journaling.

I plan to meet with Robyn Proud (Principal and leader of CITI CARE PROGRAM) to work on downsizing into smaller groups next year with her students whom are interested, and to find a better space to hold our mindfulness and yoga sessions.

Also, I plan to go forward and teach at Oswego High School in September/October on Tuesdays/Thursdays 3-4pm. Funding has been allocated on the SMART grant to provide these resources.

**Teacher Participant Name: Elizabeth Russell at Rochester School 9 & Sheridan Prep Academy**

**Please update us on any changes you made to your team action plan:**

We are a team of yoga teachers integrating social emotional learning through mindful yoga into K-12 schools. We work with teacher teams at the sites listed above, and through direct demonstration yoga classes with K-12 students. We are specifically focused on helping teachers and students develop social emotional skills and understandings through mindful yoga to promote self-awareness, focused attention, compassion for self and others, self-regulation and well-being.

Working as follows in the following contexts and activity descriptions:

In working with students in grades K-4, each session began with a group conversation with students introducing and discussing mindfulness and social emotional learning in a relevant way for younger students. I used several relevant children's storybooks as the foundation for our discussion and practice. Our practice was always rooted in breath centered movement as not only a way to move the body but to connect with 'feelings'; introducing self-awareness in both the physical and emotional bodies. In each practice, we discussed that month's "Mindful Moment" in order to make a connection to Mindful Moments and align each practice with the school-wide theme. I also occasionally used sound in the form of a singing bowl to move through the session, flowing from higher energy movement time to quieter, focused time. We typically closed with an offering of thanks to ourselves and to the group collectively in an effort to demonstrate all have the choice to move through the space we are in peacefully, with love for ourselves and others.

**Analysis of Data on Teacher Learning:**

Overwhelmingly, throughout the entire year, teachers seemed overwhelmed with 'more'; the demands and stressors present for them at work were more than 'normal' or their past experiences. For example, they expressed concern with seemingly basic issues like having enough paper and more significant issues like discipline strategies and the struggle with differentiation in the classroom and effects on student behavior. They expressed a desire for more yoga and mindfulness practices and communicated that the short meditations we did had a significant impact on their mood and wellbeing in the moment.

During sessions, I observed two distinct behavior patterns in teachers. Teachers were either "checked out", meaning they ignored me and the students, or "checked in", meaning they were engaged in the conversation or movement with the students. When the teacher was checked in, the students were overwhelmingly more engaged in listening, responding or participating.

**Analysis of Data on Student Learning:**

I observed that depending on the class mood upon my arrival, students were more or less engaged in the session, and their mood at the end of the session was often different than the beginning. Sometimes, a class was loud or disorganized when I arrived and those tended to be calmer and more relaxed (ie. students responded more quickly to instruction, less talking out of turn etc.) by the end of the session. I observed more excitement at my arrival in lower grades (K-1) and more resistance or disinterest in participation in older grades (3-4). When met with resistance, I offered older students to either observe quietly or participate.

The majority of the time, those students that elected to sit out and observe eventually decided to join and participate by the halfway mark of the session. With the exception of one student during one session, 100% of students elected to participate by the end of every session.

Many conversations during the sessions focused on acceptance of feelings. Students overwhelmingly categorized feelings like anger/frustration/sadness as “bad” or “not ok”. Most students expressed surprise when we discussed all feelings being “ok”. Most students understood appropriate/inappropriate behavior and reaction to feelings (ie. hitting someone when angry isn’t ok). Most were familiar with the ‘tools’ we discussed for handling ‘hard feelings’ and overwhelmingly, students shared that mindful moments helped them “feel better at school”, “stay calm”, “relax”, and “focus”. Most expressed that breathing exercises “feel good”, “make my body stop bouncing”, “calm down my mind”. Some shared that it was boring and many said that it made them tired or want to sleep. On many occasions, students fell asleep during the session.

On occasion, I would intentionally bring the energy of the class up, allowing them to be “crazy”, either through movement or noise (ie. fire or growling breath, or “free dance” for a count of ten), then bring the energy back down in an organized way. Many students expressed surprise at having permission to be outside the expected classroom norm of quiet/focus/calm. I observed that expressing “I trust you” was empowering to students; one said “yeah!! we did it!” after being allowed to collectively be silly/loud then when given a countdown along with directed movement & breath, calm down again.

Many sessions were either movement OR discussion and I discovered that sessions seemed more organized and effective if I did one or the other with students. Given the time constraints, students seemed overwhelmed by too many activities in a short time. We practiced breathing in each session no matter what else we did, but I observed that either a movement or discussion practice seemed more organized and left students’ calmer than trying to do everything in each short session. I also observed that during discussion sessions, students were more engaged when I aligned with their recognizable classroom language, which required alignment with the teacher beforehand. For example, one class was working on sharing their reflections and connections to stories, and using those terms in our discussion had an impact on participations; more students responded voluntarily and enthusiastically.