Title of Project
Awaken Within: A Mixed Methods Study of a Mindfulness-Based Professional Development Program in Multiple Educational Settings

Growing numbers of teachers and staff in educational institutions are reporting high levels of occupational stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, and turnover. Consequently, Mindfulness-Based Interventions (MBIs) are gaining international attention as one way of addressing high levels of negative stress, burnout, and turnover in schools. These professional development programs are designed to reduce negative stress, promote educators’ social and emotional competencies, and improve the quality of student-teacher interactions.

Dr. Sandra Quiñones, Assistant Professor at the School of Education, is partnering with Dr. Stephanie Maietta Romero from Awaken Pittsburgh to conduct a mixed methods research project examining Awaken Pittsburgh’s mindfulness-based professional development program in multiple educational settings. Awaken Pittsburgh is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote personal and community wellbeing through mindfulness programs and compassionate actions.

Dr. Quiñones and Dr. Romero are interested in learning more about what it means to work with the whole system of an organization or institution to develop mindfulness practices. From a methodological perspective, the overarching goal of this two-year project is to use a mixed methods research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the organizational support and implementation of Awaken Pittsburgh’s mindfulness-based professional development program in multiple educational settings. From a pragmatic perspective, the purpose of this study is to describe and evaluate the effect of Awaken Pittsburgh’s professional development program on perceived stress, compassion fatigue, and mindfulness practices.

Our research will provide information to local educational organizations of the potential benefits of mindfulness programming for educators and their students. From the onset of the research development, members of partnering organizations provide input on what would be most beneficial to them and guide the decision-making process. Moreover, Awaken Pittsburgh’s staff and Dr. Quiñones will collaborate with participants in designing mindfulness-based interventions and practices to use in their specific contexts. Our approach is one where the researcher and the community partner are learning from the participants to tailor the professional development in a way that builds capacity and is beneficial to all parties. Our aim is to develop a critical mass of educators with improved social and emotional competencies so that they can cultivate prosocial institutions, thus increasing the wellbeing and outcomes of students in their care.