

Middle Space Leader: Professional Quality of Life

by

Kelsey Anne Deason

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
May 6, 2023

Keywords: middle space leader, compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, burnout,
professional quality of life, mindfulness

Copyright 2023 by Kelsey Anne Deason

Approved by

Ellen B. Hahn, Chair, Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Chih-hsuan Wang, Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology
Amy Serafini, Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology
Jason Bryant, Associate Clinical Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and
Technology

Abstract

This quantitative study explored the professional quality of life of middle space leaders who are serving public school systems in the state of Alabama. This study determined if there was a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life by using the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of life Scale. There is little research on middle space leaders and their professional quality of life, thus this research study will raise awareness of their experiences with compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The central research question for this study was is there a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders. There were three subset research questions addressing the three constructs of professional quality of life; is there a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/compassion fatigue of middle space leaders, is there a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/burnout of middle space leaders, is there a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/compassion satisfaction of middle space leaders. The researcher utilized a quantitative approach and surveyed middle space leaders across Alabama anonymously using a survey software, Qualtrics. The researcher analyzed the results of the surveys to determine if there was a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life. The study suggests that there is a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality life of middle space leaders. The findings from the study contributed to the body of literature around middle space leaders and their professional quality of life. There are limitations to this study. The researcher recommends further research to be conducted around this topic.

Acknowledgements

Reaching the goal of becoming Dr. Kelsey Deason has been challenging yet so rewarding. This adventure has taught me a lot, not only about educational practices and leadership but also about myself personally. I have learned to persevere through difficult times and how to rely on the people I love and trust: my husband, my children, my family, my friends, Dr. Hahn, and my committee.

To my husband, Scott Deason, thank you for always being my biggest cheerleader. There have been many times throughout the past five years that I have questioned my ability and wanted to quit; however, you always encouraged me and helped me see my purpose. You have been Mr. Mom on many weekends as I traveled to Greenville or Auburn for classes and when I needed to shut myself away to write. You kept our family grounded during the busy and challenging times of juggling toddlers and graduate studies. I hope this work makes you proud of me. I could not have finished this Ph.D. without you!

To my children, Everley and Haynes, all you know is mommy in school. I have been learning, growing, and working on this goal your entire lives. I hope you have seen the sacrifices and challenges as examples of how persistence leads to the accomplishment of goals. You are my purpose! I will always fight for you and with you to push you towards excellence. You can do amazing things. I am truly blessed to be your mommy!

To my mom and dad, I hope this makes you proud of me because nothing makes me happier than making you proud! I want to thank you for all of your support and for helping me with Everley and Haynes which allowed me to work towards this goal. I appreciate the encouragement and guidance from both of you! Your prayers and support kept me going through the past five years. I am truly blessed to have you both as my parents!

To my older brother, Kyle, you always told me that I had the ability to do extraordinary things. I hope you are looking down on me now proud and cheering me on! You were my guidance for this dissertation. Resilience and mental health are issues in our world. I will always wonder if you would still be here if I had the knowledge and skills from this research earlier.

To my cohort at Auburn University and most of all, Angela Garrett, thank you for always being a text message or call away for mental and emotional support. No one understands the process of reaching this goal like you do. Auburn University has given me a lot, but the most irreplaceable thing is my friendship with you. Thank you for always helping to ground me when I was struggling to see the purpose. I am not sure we would have made it this far without each other.

To Dr. Ellen Hahn, thank you for all your time, commitment, knowledge, and patience throughout this process. You have always guided me to find the correct information pertaining to my research and offering support when needed. I will forever be indebted to you for challenging me and seeing my ability even when I questioned if I was able to complete this process. You often thought higher of me than I did of myself, and I am forever thankful for that. I have always respected you as a professor and scholar, but as a dissertation chair, you were irreplaceable.

To Dr. Serafini, Dr. Bryant, and Dr. Wang, thank you for your continuous support and guidance to help me reach my goal of earning my Ph.D. You each provided knowledge and expertise in areas that were crucial to the success of this dissertation. I consider myself to have had the best dissertation committee. I truly appreciate all of your time and the encouragement you provided me throughout this process. I will forever be indebted to you and forever grateful to have had this time learning from each of you!

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgments.....	3
List of Tables	8
List of Figures	9
Chapter I: Introduction.....	10
Middle Space Leaders.....	10
Secondary Trauma in Middle Space Leadership	11
Job Satisfaction.....	12
Compassion Fatigue.....	12
Burnout	13
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction	13
Statement of the Problem.....	14
Purpose of the Study.....	15
Conceptual Framework.....	16
Research Question	17
Research Design.....	18
Assumptions.....	18
Significance of the Study	18
Definitions of Terms	20
Organization of Study	21
Chapter II: Literature Review	22
Middle Space Quality of Life	23

Middle Space Leaders as Steppingstones	27
Job Satisfaction	30
Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma.....	32
Barriers of Middle Space Leaders.....	34
Burnout	36
Attention to Self-Care	38
Stress as a Middle Space Leader.....	41
Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction	48
Conceptual Framework.....	56
Chapter III: Methodology	61
Research Design.....	61
Research Questions	62
Significance of the Study	62
Participants.....	63
Data Collection	65
Analysis.....	70
Chapter IV: Results.....	72
Data Collection Procedures.....	72
Reliability.....	75
Research Question Findings	77
Research Sub Questions A.....	80
Research Sub Questions B	81
Research Sub Questions C	81

Summary of Results	82
Chapter V: Discussion	84
Summary of the Study	85
Research Questions.....	86
Methodology Review.....	87
Major Findings.....	88
Compassion Fatigue.....	88
Burnout	89
Compassion Satisfaction.....	90
Mindfulness.....	91
Relationship Between Mindfulness and Professional Quality of Life.....	91
Significance of the Study	92
Limitations	92
Implications for Practice.....	93
Implications for Middle Space Leaders	93
Implications for Leadership Preparedness Programs/Prof. Development	95
Implications for Future Research.....	97
Conclusion	99
References.....	100
Appendix A Institutional Review Board Approval	106

List of Tables

Table 1 Age Descriptive Statistics.....	64
Table 2 Experience Descriptive Statistics.....	64
Table 3 Variables	74
Table 4 Professional Quality of Life Scale/Compassion Fatigue Reliability	76
Table 5 Professional Quality of Life Scale/Burnout Reliability.....	76
Table 6 Professional Quality of Life Scale/Compassion Satisfaction Reliability	76
Table 7 Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Reliability	77
Table 8 Professional Quality of Life Descriptive Statistics.....	78
Table 9 Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue Descriptive Statistics.....	78
Table 10 Professional Quality of Life/Burnout Descriptive Statistics.....	78
Table 11 Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction Descriptive Statistics	79
Table 12 Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Descriptive Statistics	79
Table 13 MAAS/ProQOL: Compassion Fatigue Pearson Correlation	81
Table 14 MAAS/ProQOL: Burnout Pearson Correlation.....	81
Table 15 MAAS/ProQOL: Compassion Satisfaction Pearson Correlation	82

List of Figures

Figure 1 Middle Space Leader Professional Quality of Life	16
Figure 2 Middle Space Leader Professional Quality of Life	56
Figure 3 Diagram of Professional Quality of Life	66
Figure 4 Research Question Matrix	71

Chapter I: Introduction

“A growing body of research highlights a range of tensions in middle leadership with regard to the inherent difficulties for the role holder in trying to fulfill varied and often conflicting demands” (Branson et al., 2016, p. 2).

Stress has become an inescapable component of education. Many recent studies focus on the extremity of the stress and exhaustion of educational leaders which lends itself to the topic of mental health and emotional capacity. One of the most frequent concerns revolves around the ever-changing workloads of leaders and administrators (Mahfouz & Richardson, 2021). Within education, there are multiple levels of leadership. School-level leaders such as principals and assistant principals serve individual schools (Burch & Spillane., 2004). Higher-level leaders represent the school board members and superintendents (Burch & Spillane., 2004). However, there are leaders who serve school systems that are not at the school level nor the higher level, these leaders are referred to as middle space leaders (Burch & Spillane., 2004).

Middle Space Leaders

Middle space leaders are working at the central offices of school systems across the United States of America. These positions are serving different educators while delivering implementation strategies for new initiatives that are dispensed from higher leaders (superintendents, deputy superintendents) within the school district. All actions middle space leaders make are driven by data to ensure students are successful (Gilmore, 1997). Therefore, the middle space leader experiences a mental or emotional weight depending on the success or lack of success the students display within the district in which the middle space leader serves. If the data is not improving, the middle space leaders often feel like they are not successful within their position (Gilmore, 1997).

Often, middle space leaders are overwhelmed due to the increase of expectations and needs within the district they serve. “After superintendents and school boards establish new policies, mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide’ or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 3). The inconsistent expectations or demands of the mid-level leaders result in an increase of unstable feelings within their position. These unstable feelings tend to lead to a decrease of job satisfaction and an increase of compassion fatigue and burnout leading to stress and a decrease in health. Thus, middle space leaders can become less likely to lead with efficiency making them unable to improve the success of the students and teachers they serve (Gilmore, 1997, p. 1).

Secondary Trauma in Middle Space Leadership

Middle space leaders interact with educators, leaders, parents, community members, and students daily. Their positions require them to offer support and advice focused around improving student’s success, however, this exposes them to traumatic materials or events indirectly through the individuals they are working with, which leads to secondary trauma (Namminga, 2021). “Any educator who works directly with traumatized children and adolescents is vulnerable to the effects of trauma” (Fowler, 2015, p. 31). Secondary trauma can be defined as “the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the firsthand trauma experiences of another” (Namminga, 2021, p. 4). Middle space leaders are exposed to indirect trauma daily due to the variety of individuals they interact with and can increase when the middle space leader is working with individuals who are “unsupportive and demanding” (Namminga, 2021, p.20). “Secondary trauma wears us out—physically, emotionally, and mentally” (Namminga, 2021, p. 20). When middle space leaders experience secondary trauma,

they may begin showing symptoms of being impatient, snarky, angry, and/or frustrated. Also, headaches, stomach aches, backpain, irritability, and lack of empathy are common side effects of individuals who are exposed to secondary trauma on a regular basis (Namminga, 2021). Middle space leaders are stressed.

Job Satisfaction

Many middle space leaders experience doubt and inconsistent support. This tends to lead to middle space leaders feeling a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities because they feel like they are not impactful with what they are doing in their position. “The responsibility for achieving the goals and meeting expectations of both ends of the hierarchy are placed on the mid-level leaders’ shoulders, who find themselves engaging heavily in bridging the two sides” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 519). Continuing to be consistent with the support offered is difficult when middle space leaders experience self-doubt. This decrease in middle space leaders’ self-efficacy tends to result in a decline of the quality of their support offered to the educators in their school systems. As the decrease in the quality persists, the amount of doubt these leaders experience increases which causes a continuous cycle of a declining rate of satisfaction.

Compassion Fatigue

Middle space leaders collaborate and interact with teachers, students, and administrators from different backgrounds and vicariously experiencing their trauma through interactions and conversations. Compassion fatigue is when an individual experiences emotional, physical, and social side effects from helping others (DeMatthews et al., 2021). This often happens when the individual is carrying a burden from trauma or emotional experiences that another person has experienced. “Researchers in the mental health field have found evidence that professionals with

higher levels of compassion satisfaction also have increased experience, specialized training, and positive coping and career-sustaining behaviors” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). Middle space leaders often experience compassion fatigue due to the overwhelming amount of support they offer to students, teachers, and other educators who are experiencing trauma or educational burdens. This has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the school systems and education.

Burnout

When middle space leaders experience a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities and experience compassion fatigue and secondary trauma, they often experience feelings that are symptoms of burnout. Schwab et al. (1986) provide a definition for burnout that includes three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low accomplishment. These feelings make middle space leaders lack the motivation needed to continue supporting the students, teachers, and leaders within the districts they support due to overwhelming emotional and social fatigue (Schwab et al., 1986). “Job burnout can be thought of as a psychological process—a series of attitudinal and emotional reactions—that an employee goes through as a result of job-related and personal experiences” (Schwab et al., 1986, p. 14). These feelings are due to the abundance of stress they are experiencing throughout their daily lives and can render middle space leaders unproductive due to the overwhelming nature of compounded stress. Middle space leaders do not always quit when they experience burnout, however, their productivity and the quality of their support often decreases due to these overwhelming feelings of stress and exhaustion.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Middle space leaders are experiencing occupational stress on a daily basis. The workload and secondary trauma experienced throughout their daily interactions are leading to a decrease in their mental and emotional health. These negative experiences are causing middle space leaders to experience stress. Middle space leaders who are experiencing stress and feelings of burnout can improve their mental and emotional health through mindfulness practices. This strategy is meant to help improve the way individuals are impacted by stressful thoughts and events by decreasing the way they react to emotional and stressful experiences. “Mindfulness training leads to a fundamental change in relationship to experience (reperceiving), which leads to changes in self-regulation, values clarification, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, and exposure” (Carmody, 2009, p. 613). Mindfulness refers to the capability of being aware of the present moment without judgment or striving; it means paying attention to purpose (Wells, 2013). Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to experience a reduced reaction towards stressors by being aware of how the body is reacting before the side effects happen by visualizing and seeing what is causing their reaction.

Statement of the Problem

Middle space leaders are overworked and often overstressed. The position consists of inconsistent circumstances that tend to lead to unstable feelings which over time lead to stress and a decrease in health (Gilmore, 1997). These leaders are tasked with collaborating with school leaders, teachers, and specialists to determine best practices for new initiatives based on data while building relationships with the schools across a district and while placing a focus on student data and continuous improvement plans. Middle space leaders are expected to provide professional development and collaborative opportunities for the educators in the districts to

make sure they are equipped with innovative instructional practices to help their students succeed. These tasks can change frequently and lead to emotional exhaustion and fatigue.

Middle space leaders are experiencing compassion fatigue and feelings of burnout due to the overwhelming expectations they are facing and everchanging circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased these feelings of anxiety, stress, and burnout in educators. “An ATP survey, fielded in early January 2021, found that nearly one-quarter of teachers indicated a desire to leave their jobs at the end of the school year, compared with an average national turnover rate of 16% pre-pandemic” (Zamarro et al., 2022, p. 3).

If the mental health of middle space leaders is not a focus, the retention of teachers will continue to decline due to the lack of support the teachers will receive from middle space leaders. If middle space leaders are not mentally and emotionally healthy, they will be unable to provide support and professional development opportunities for the teachers in the school districts they serve. This will result in a spiral effect and end with the student’s academic experiences declining. To date, there has been little or no research discussing the mental and emotional health of middle space leaders within school districts. To provide support for these educators, it is important that a quantitative study be conducted to determine the impacts that compassion fatigue, burnout, and job satisfaction have on middle space leaders’ professional quality of life and how mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques are connected to the overall professional quality of life of middle space leaders.

Purpose of the Study

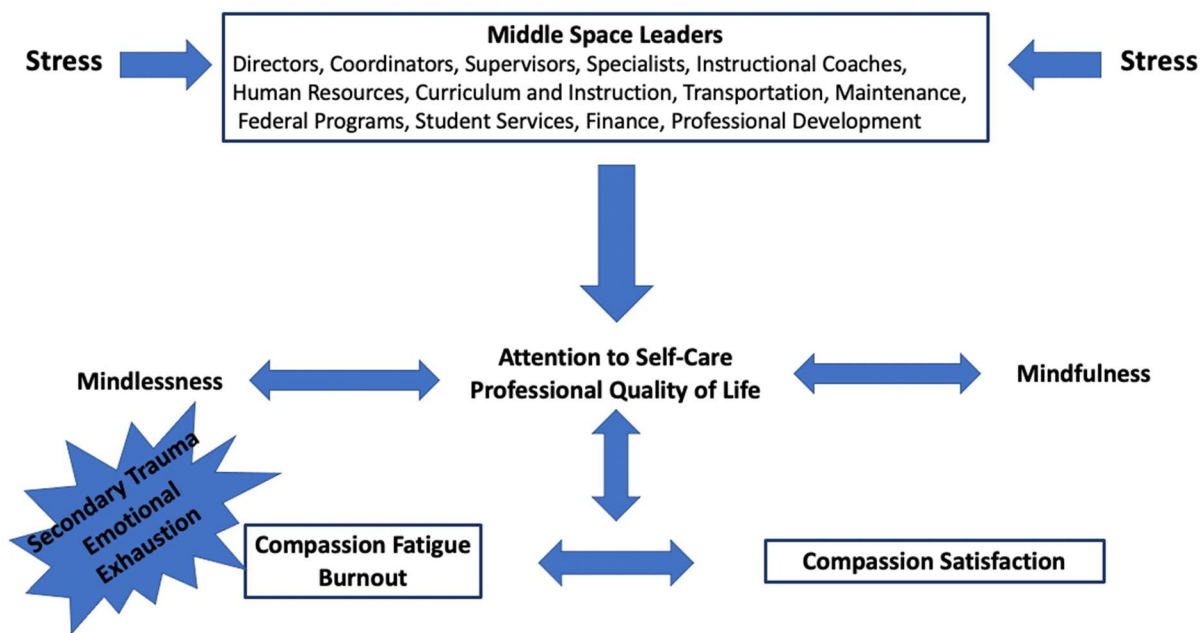
The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the relationship of middle space leaders in school districts across Alabama. Specifically, the study will determine the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders in Alabama during the 2022-2023 school year, as

measured by the Professional Quality of Life survey and how the dimensions of job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout are related to mindfulness. The study will explore the relationship between mindfulness practices and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders using the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale with the intent to inform future research and future K-12 school district practitioners of strategies to combat educator attrition.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

Middle Space Leader Professional Quality of Life



Middle space leaders are educators who serve in a leadership capacity at the central offices across school systems in America. These leaders serve many educators through different avenues due to the variety of populations they are serving. When a middle space leader is acknowledging a request or need from a school leader (principal or assistant principal), the

approach will be different than when the middle space leader is supporting a teacher in a classroom setting. Middle space leaders are supporting educators within their districts through different approaches. They are responsible for implementing initiatives across the district that will increase student achievement. Professional developments are planned and implemented by these leaders. Many middle space leaders are working more hours a day than their contracted time. Most middle space leaders go above and beyond their contracted expectations because they want their school systems and students to be successful (Branson et al., 2016). There are many areas that experience consequences due to the overworked and overtired outcome of the middle space leader's role. These leaders experience a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities and an increase of compassion fatigue and burnout which results in a decrease in their professional quality of life (Stamm, 2010).

The size of the school system the middle space leader supports impacts the amount of work the middle space leader juggles. That does not mean, however, that the middle space leader is not experiencing a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities, compassion fatigue, or burnout due to the stress the profession presents. Educators are passionate about student achievement and strive to learn and support students to encourage success. The size of the school system does not change the impact middle space leaders experience due to the emotional and social exhaustion felt at the end of their days. Most of the time, larger school systems support more schools, however, the amount of support at the central office is larger due to the number of students, teachers, and school leaders who are needing support.

There is research and literature that discusses all the topics stated above: satisfaction of responsibilities, compassion fatigue, burnout, educator stress, and mindfulness practices. There even is literature that discusses how mindfulness is a stress reduction technique. However, this

study takes the literature that is circling around the barriers of middle space leaders and makes a connection between the professional quality of life while focusing on the satisfaction of responsibility, compassion fatigue, and burnout of middle space leaders, and addressing how mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques are impactful to middle space leader overall professional quality of life.

Research Question

1. To what extent is there a relationship between the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)?
 - a) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life /Compassion Satisfaction?
 - b) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life /Burnout?
 - c) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue?

Research Design

Due to the lack of research connecting professional quality of life (job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout) and stress reduction techniques of middle space leaders, the researcher selected a quantitative study utilizing the following two surveys: the Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL) and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Detailed design processes are provided in Chapter Three.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed all participants would complete the survey accurately and honestly regarding their personal experiences and perceptions of their professional experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study will raise awareness of the experiences of district-level middle education leaders and the impact the stress they experience has on their social and emotional health/well-being. Currently, there is little research on district-level middle education leaders and their responsibilities.

Mindfulness captures a quality of consciousness that is characterized by clarity and vividness of current experiences and functioning and thus stands in contrast to the mindless, less awake states of habitual or automatic functioning that may be chronic for many individuals (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 823).

Mindfulness is a growing area of research. It is often used with research focused on professions and how it can help improve the well-being of those individuals. There is, however, a gap in the research concerning mindfulness used with middle space leaders within education to improve their job satisfaction and performance leading to student and teacher success. This study, therefore, addresses the impact mindfulness can have on the stress levels of middle space leaders.

The stressors of the career of middle space leaders do not disappear. However, mindfulness practices help middle space leaders cope and react in a healthier way to the stressors to which they are exposed. Mindfulness refers to the capability of being aware of the present moment without judgment or striving; it means paying attention to the purpose (Wells, 2013). Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to experience a reduced reaction towards stressors by being aware of how the body is beginning to react before the side effects happen by visualizing and seeing what is causing their reaction. "Mindfulness meditation includes seeing life and

reality exactly as they are, becoming aware of thoughts and feelings and noting them as such” (Wells, 2013, p. 340).

The results of this study will contribute to the development of a framework of stress management strategies to help improve the social and emotional health of district-level middle educational leaders.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are implemented within this study:

- Burnout: “burnout is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or in doing your job effectively” (Stamm, 2005, p. 13).
- Compassion fatigue: “work-related, secondary exposure to extremely stressful events” (Stamm, 2005, p. 13).
- Compassion satisfaction: “Compassion satisfaction is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well” (Stamm, 2010, p. 12).
- Middleness: “condition in which we are caught between the worlds of others, pushed, pulled and torn by their conflicting perspectives, priorities, and demands” (Gilmore, 1997, p. 1).
- Middle space leader: central office staff within a school system that serve between the superintendents and school-based leaders (principals and assistant principals). These leaders hold positions as directors, specialists, and/or supervisors at the central office.
- Mindfulness: the capability of being aware of the present moment without judgment or striving; it means paying attention to the purpose (Wells, 2013).
- Professional Quality of Life: “Professional quality of life is the quality one feels in relation to their work as a helper” (Stamm, 2010, p. 8).

- Stress: “Stress has been generically defined as an unpleasant emotional experience associated with feelings of anger, anxiety, tension, and frustration and linked with specific environmental triggers” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 60).
- Stress-reduction technique: strategies that help the physical, mental, and emotional reactions of stressors.

Organization of Study

This study was organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, the researcher discussed the problem while highlighting the purpose of the study, research questions, design of the study, and explaining the conceptual framework used to guide the research of the study. Chapter Two was a detailed literature review related to the significance of the study while discussing the professional responsibilities of middle space leaders in the central offices of public-school systems across the state of Alabama, the professional quality of life of these middle space leaders with a focus on job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout. The researcher then provided a detailed relationship of the impact on the professional quality of life and stress and how mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques impact the stress of these leaders. Chapter Three consisted of an outline of the research methodology, participant selection, data collection, and how the data was analyzed. The results of the study were presented in Chapter Four and Chapter Five and the researcher provided an interpretation of the results and implications and offered recommendations for any future studies related to the topic.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The levels of leadership within education are various and include the following: school leaders, middle space leaders, and superintendents. Middle space leaders are program managers, content area directors, budget specialists, and others who administer or manage programs or services but are not in top cabinet positions, such as deputy superintendents or child education officers (Burch & Spillane., 2004, p. 10). Gilmore (1997) describes middle leaders as “being in between a higher and lower group in terms of status or power” (p. 1). Middle space leaders or mid-level leaders are often stuck between decision-making leadership roles and colleagues that are seeking answers or support. Middleness can be described as a “condition in which we are caught between the worlds of others, pushed, pulled and torn by their conflicting perspectives, priorities, and demands” (Gilmore, 1997, p. 1).

Middle space leaders may face experiences of becoming responsible for making decisions with higher-level leaders through planning meetings or initiative implementations that were developed without the input or inclusion of middle space leaders. Also, middle space leaders may not be included in conversations or situations which leads to missed information about certain topics and places them in the same scenario as the lower-level leaders or classroom teachers. “Hence a developmental challenge for leaders is to know when they are in a middle position and access the appropriate skills” (Gilmore, 1997, p. 1). The inconsistent expectations or demands of middle space leaders result in an increase of unstable feelings within their positions. These unstable feelings tend to lead to stress and a decrease in health which results in them being less likely to lead with efficiency and unable to improve the success of the students and teachers they serve.

Middle Space Quality of Life

In order to be a successful middle space leader or central office staff of a school system, the position requires specific skills to balance the responsibilities and expectations related to their positions. They often are the bridges between schools and the higher leaders in the school system. Therefore, they are the true initiating factors of new instructional initiatives or academic reforms. Research by Burch and Spillane (2004) suggest that “mid-level managers have significant impacts on how district reform policies are understood and acted on by school leaders” (p. 10). The higher leaders in school systems, such as superintendents, and school board members, are often the people who are responsible for creating and approving new initiatives within the district. Middle space leaders, however, are responsible for initiating the steps that are needed to implement the new policies and initiatives within the district. “Mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide’ or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 4). Initiating these transformations and initiatives is what supports the growth of school systems but takes a lot of planning and preparation to successfully implement.

Burch and Spillane (2004) explain the following responsibilities that middle space leaders juggle within their positions in *Leading from the Middle: Mid-Level District Staff and Instructional Improvement*:

Numerous studies emphasize the central office’s bureaucratic function of compliance monitoring that is dominated by command-and-control strategies. However, they ignore the range of activities that central office staff employ to support district instructional improvement initiatives. Beyond monitoring change and enforcing compliance in schools, mid-level district staff-- science directors,

program managers, curriculum support staff, budget specialists and others-- play other important roles in the complex work of implementing district instructional reforms. (p. 7)

Middle space leaders are the bridge between reform decisions and the implementation of new initiatives. Often, middle leaders are creating and preparing the professional developments that train the teachers and school leaders on new and innovative initiatives that are focused on student achievement. These leaders are a large part of the improvement process within the district and their responsibilities are centered around achievement scores. Within this responsibility, there are multiple steps to reach these goals: data meetings, learning support visits, observations, and more. Everything middle space leaders do, however, should be focused on the achievement of students through effective teacher instructional practices. There are many factors that impact the results desired by the school systems.

Helping students learn takes an army of educators and stakeholders. Each person within a school district and community has a pivotal role at helping students become successful citizens. Middle space leaders are the connecting piece between relationships across the district. There are many responsibilities of middle space leaders “yet the actual practice of middle leadership lacks clarity and precision” (Branson, 2016, p. 2). Some days bring unexpected obstacles, and some days are more routine. Due to the inconsistencies of the position and lack of routines, middle leaders are often left feeling unsettled or concerned that they are not impacting student achievement or educator success. “A growing body of research highlights a range of tensions in middle leadership with regard to the inherent difficulties for the role holder in trying to fulfill varied and often conflicting demands” (Branson, 2016, p. 2). The differentiating responsibilities

of the position change daily and can be expected based on delegations from higher leadership positions.

By accepting delegated responsibility, the middle leader is set apart structurally from his or her colleagues yet is expected to work closely alongside those colleagues as a fellow member of the department of Faculty, with many of the same day-to-day academic responsibilities as their colleagues. (Branson, 2016, p. 2)

Middle space leaders are expected to implement procedures and policies dependent on the department of which the middle space leader is a part, but they lack tangible views of outcomes from their work. Therefore, by not being able to see their impacts on success, they lack the capacity for feeling significant.

Middle space leaders are sometimes referred to as mid-level leaders or mid-level central office staff. Burch and Spillane (2004) discuss the common responsibilities of middle space central office staff in their article “Leading from the Middle: Mid-Level District Staff and Instructional Improvement” by listing four focus areas: tool designers, data managers, trainers, support providers, and network builders. As a tool designer, the middle space leader is translating the initiatives sent down from the superintendent and/or board members into tangible items the teachers can use during their instructional practices. These items may include rubrics, assessments, lesson plans, presentations, and other forms of instructional support items. This focus area changes as new initiatives or curriculum change. Being a tool designer is a facet of the position that is always changing and evolving to improve student success. The data manager portion of the role requires analyzing the data to make student-focused decisions. As data managers, middle space leaders are supporting schools by analyzing data during data meetings and offering instructional support as needed to improve the students' data. These data reviews

can be conducted formally through meetings or informally through walk-throughs and observations. Data analyses should drive the decisions within the other areas of the job responsibilities. middle space leaders are trainers and support providers. They provide professional developments for teachers and principals that are instruction-focused through workshops, planning teams, individual mentoring or coaching, and other avenues of delivering instructional support. Also, middle space leaders support schools through building networks with other experts in their field. For middle space leaders to be knowledgeable in their fields, they must remain submerged in the research surrounding their areas of focus. New ideas and innovations are released daily. Being life-long learners is an important part of the middle space leadership role, which often results in time spent outside working hours on increasing their knowledge of up-to-date research and innovations. The responsibilities of the position do not end when the school day ends.

Oftentimes, middle space leaders are used to communicate information to schools through the district. “The middle is seen to play a role by helping to implement changes from the top and to move around ideas and strategies that are percolating from the beneath” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2019, p. 95). Districts often utilize their middle space leaders to “plug the policy implementation gap” across school districts (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2019, p. 95). middle space leaders are communicating with schools on a regular basis delivering information and resources to help the implementation of new initiatives and policies. This process looks different for each department; however, it is an important part of the implementation of policies and initiatives. “Mid-level leadership is often associated with managing professional learning communities whose aim, among others, is to affect children’s learning and growth, promote organizational improvement, empower stakeholders, and encourage their participation” (Moshel & Berkovich,

2020, p. 12). Not only are middle space leaders delivering information from the central office and state department to the schools, but they also help relay concerns and strategies from the schools to the central office staff. Often middle space leaders are the messengers from the schools to the superintendents and deputy superintendents.

Middle space leaders are the connecting pieces between the central office and the schools. Often, middle space leaders are the support for schools through coaching, mentoring, modeling instructional practices, leading data meetings, etc. It is important for middle space leaders to build collaborative relationships with the teachers and principals within the districts they serve that encompass trust, respect, and credibility. Building relationships takes time; however, professional developments must be delivered before there is time to build strong relationships. Middle space leaders must, therefore, continuously develop and strengthen their relationships with all educators in the system. Educators are much more receptive to receiving support from middle space leaders when they trust and respect the middle space leader because relationships are a crucial part of education. Relationships, therefore, are key to receiving buy-in from the teachers who are implementing the initiatives set by the board of education. Middle space leaders need to be knowledgeable in their areas of focus and relationship-focused. “Mid-level central office staff sit at the intersection of important reform activities, placing them in a unique position to make connections between policy and practice” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p.8).

Middle Space Leaders as Steppingstones

Middle space leaders are often the steppingstones in school districts that help represent core organizational values through their actions, implementations, and discourse. Often, the middle space leader is the “transmitter of core strategic values through the enactment of the role

as mentor, coach, and guide” (Clegg & McAuley, 2005, p. 23). As implementation of new initiatives and changes are happening within school districts, middle space leaders are responsible for upholding the district's values and missions through their conversations with principals, teachers, students, and stakeholders. New strategies, techniques, and initiatives happen often in education as research develops and improves areas of focus; however, the missions and values of school districts do not change as rapidly. It is important for middle space leaders to stay grounded in their values and philosophies as they implement new initiatives across the districts they serve. For this to happen, the middle space leader must have a robust relationship with the senior managers within the school district because those who are serving within the district need to have similar beliefs and visions for where the district is going and understand their goals together. Consistency and collaboration are important components to growth.

Middle space leaders are juggling many different obstacles within their daily schedules. It is important for middle space leaders to plan carefully and remain organized due to the multiple schools and educators they serve. Managing their schedules can be stressful due to events or expectations overlapping, so it is important for middle space leaders to be able to prioritize their needs while creating schedules and managing their requirements. When middle space leaders have schedules that are overflowing with meetings, professional developments, learning support visits, or service events, they may be unable to complete other responsibilities that are required in their positions. This can lead to increasing amounts of middle space leader work during non-work hours. “Any work not done in the daytime, in standard working hours, or on a regular schedule has the potential to significantly affect both sleep and circadian rhythms” (Rosekind, 2005, p. 680). Middle

space leaders can become overwhelmed and overworked resulting in exhaustion, fatigue, negative health, and stress.

Middle space leadership is a role that is relationally focused. For middle space leaders to implement their responsibilities successfully, they must have positive relationships with their colleagues and the schools they serve. For middle leaders to be successful leaders, however, they must also have positive relationships with their leaders.

The understanding of middle leadership as relational leadership acknowledges that the important relationships are not only between the middle leader and the colleagues she or he is leading, but also between the middle leader and their own leader/s, as well as between the middle leader and his or her co-middle leaders. (Branson, 2016, p. 3)

Learning is social and requires relationship-building for maximum learning to occur. For students and teachers to receive the best from leaders, they must have collaborative relationships with each other to foster growth and development because “the most powerful influences consist of deeply human relationships in which two or more persons engage with one another” (Branson, 2016, p. 3). While it is important for middle space leaders to collaborate with their schools, it is equally important for those leaders to collaborate with other middle space leaders across departments within the central office. Middle space leaders are represented throughout many different departments in a school system: human resources, curriculum and instruction, special education, federal programs, student services, maintenance and facilities, and more. Therefore, it is difficult for each department to know what is transpiring in each department unless they collaborate. Collaborating with each department can help level out school systems’ hierarchical processes and include every leader in the decision-making to develop a more cohesive system. “Without the engagement of the middle, the top lacks first-hand knowledge of what is happening

in the schools. And the bottom lacks colleagues who can help to communicate what is transpiring in other schools undertaking similar reforms” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2019, p. 95). For instructional initiatives to be effective in school improvement efforts, there must be a collaboration across the district; however, juggling these collaborative initiatives can cause challenges for many educators despite the passion surrounding the need of the professional developments.

Job Satisfaction

Middle space leaders support many people throughout their profession. Many middle space leaders are available to schools for support through professional development, data meetings, parent involvement, and implementation processes of new initiatives. Middle space leaders are passionate about educator and student success. When principals, teachers, and students are experiencing success, middle space leaders experience satisfaction of their responsibilities which leads to less stress; however, when there are barriers presented throughout their days, middle space leaders experience stress and that impacts their job satisfaction. It is hard to enjoy something when it causes stress. Therefore, when the stress of the profession is increased, middle space leaders struggle to experience satisfaction of their responsibilities. Job satisfaction is an important part of becoming and remaining successful within the profession. “Job satisfaction can impact career longevity and tenure” (Kitchel et al., 2012, p. 32).

Job satisfaction is a complex yet important component of education as a career. “Research on job satisfaction in the field of education has explored both the consequences (outcomes) and antecedents (influences) of teacher satisfaction” (Perrachione et al., 2008, p. 2). New initiatives that are implemented each school year and middle space leaders are key during

the implementation process of those new initiatives. Implementing new initiatives and seeing the inconsistencies of changes can cause stress to middle space leaders which can impact their perception of job satisfaction. It is important to help educators determine a way to experience job satisfaction even through the hurdles and obstacles they have daily. The overwhelming inconsistencies within education are leading to extremely high turnover rates. “Turnover among the nation’s teachers rank significantly higher than other professions” (Perrachione et al., 2008, p. 1). There are many factors contributing to the increase of turnover rates, however, job satisfaction is a contributor to retaining educators.

Job satisfaction is described differently throughout the literature. “Hoppock defined job satisfaction as any combination of psychological, physiological and environmental circumstances that cause a person truthfully to say I am satisfied with my job” (Aziri, 2011, p. 77). Vroom “defines job satisfaction as affective orientations on the part of individuals toward work roles which they are presently occupying” (Aziri, 2011, p. 77). “One of the most often cited definitions on job satisfaction is the one given by Spector according to whom job satisfaction has to do with the way people feel about their job and its various aspects” (Aziri, 2011, p. 77). Job satisfaction can be impacted by outside influences and overwhelming responsibilities; however, it is a personal response to the external influences (Aziri, 2011, p. 77). “Job satisfaction is the collection of feeling and beliefs that people have about their current job” (Aziri, 2011, p. 78). Middle space leaders’ perceptions of their profession and how they feel about their responsibilities results in positive feelings and job satisfaction or negative feelings and burnout. “The importance of job satisfaction specially emerges to surface if had in mind the many negative consequences of job dissatisfaction such a lack of loyalty, increased absenteeism, increase number of accidents, etc.” (Aziri, 2011, p. 79). “Job satisfaction is a worker’s sense of

achievement and success on the job” (Aziri, 2011, p. 78). When middle space leaders are feeling effective and successful within their profession, there is a higher perception of job satisfaction. This can be greatly impacted by the relationships and interpersonal experiences throughout their daily experiences. “There is a considerable impact of the employees’ perceptions for the nature of his work and the level of overall job satisfaction” (Aziri, 2011, p. 85).

Being a relationally driven profession middle space leaders often experience a juggling effect of balancing the needs and professional desires of educators within the district. When meetings and professional development encounters are negative and nonproductive, middle space leaders begin to feel a lack of satisfaction of their responsibilities. “Job satisfaction further implies enthusiasm and happiness with one’s work” (Aziri, 2011, p. 78). When interactions with teachers, stake holders, school level leaders, and other middle space leaders are positive there is a greater chance of experiencing feelings of enthusiasm and happiness relating to their profession. However, middle space leaders’ self-efficacy is impacted in a negative manor due to unsuccessful results of conversations and interactions with the educators they are supporting. When the support the middle space leaders are offering is not accepted or encouraged, the satisfaction of responsibilities is decreased.

Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma

Middle space leaders collaborate and interact with teachers, students, and administrators from different backgrounds and vicariously experience their trauma through interactions and conversations. Compassion fatigue is when an individual experiences emotional, physical, and social side effects from helping others (DeMatthews et al., 2021). This often happens when the individual is carrying a burden from trauma or from the emotional experiences that another person has experienced. Middle space leaders often experience compassion fatigue due to the

overwhelming amount of support they offer to students, teachers, and other educators who are experiencing trauma or educational burdens. Compassion fatigue can result in a decline in the middle space leader's emotional health with symptoms of "exhaustion, frustration, anger and depression typical of burnout" (Stamm, B. 2010, p. 12).

Compassion fatigue is often referred to as vicarious traumatization or secondary trauma, "which describes the impact of repeated empathic engagement with trauma survivors and associated cognitive, schematic, and other psychological effects" (Sprang et al., 2007, p. 2). Middle space leaders are engaging with educators, students, and stake holders frequently with different experiences and backgrounds. This results in interactions with individuals who may have been impacted by traumatic events. Middle space leaders are support staff within the school systems they serve with servant-styled responsibilities that support the educators and students within the districts they serve; therefore, they often receive information regarding traumatic events the individuals they interact with have endured. Secondary trauma or secondary traumatic stress is often referred to as "the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other—the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Bride et al., 2007, p. 155). Middle space leaders often experience secondary trauma as the cost of caring about the educators and students with whom they work who are experiencing difficult traumatic events in their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an increase in compassion fatigue for educators, as well.

Health care workers and educators gave had to absorb unexpected changes in their work, not only making it more demanding, but requiring them to adapt to new demands, and

work in the context of uncertainty generated by the pandemic, with the imminent urgency of needing to have the resources to help patients/clients. (Perez-Chacon et al., 2021, p. 2)

Middle space leaders may experience increased stress and emotional exhaustion due to their passion for helping students learn while balancing the needs for protecting themselves and the educators and students with whom they interact.

There are diverse emotional burdens middle space leaders experience due to the interactions they experience throughout their days. “Education involves an excessive emotional demand in the form of assistance, converting it in a risk factor for development of burnout” (Perez-Chacon et al., 2021, p. 2). While compassion fatigue has increased among educators, there are educators who experience compassion satisfaction. Compassion satisfaction is often a result of self-efficacy, empathy, and intervention programs. “It has been observed that training highly sensitive people in intervention programs based on mindfulness, could reduce their stress and increase their sense of personal realization” (Perez-Chacon et al., 2021, p. 3); therefore, transitioning middle space leaders’ reactions to secondary trauma and emotional exhaustion through mindfulness practices can shift their reaction from compassion fatigue to compassion satisfaction. “Researchers in the mental health field have found evidence that professionals with higher levels of compassion satisfaction also have increased experience, specialized training, and positive coping and career-sustaining behaviors” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). Individuals who experience compassion satisfaction tend to be more “motivated by a sense of satisfaction derived from helping others” (Bride et al., 2007, p. 156).

Barriers of Middle Space Leaders

Middle space leadership is a stressful profession. “Middle leadership roles are increasingly seen as crucial to success, with middle leaders recognized as key brokers within the

faculty, playing a pivotal role through their ability to control and influence the flow of information” (Branson et al., 2016, p. 2). The professional responsibilities and requirements within the profession can increase stress. Middle space leaders make decisions that impact students through their teachers’ implementation of lessons, strategies, and district-level expectations. These responsibilities lay a burden on middle space leaders that increase stress and anxiety. Being stuck in the middle leadership sector can be challenging due to juggling the balance between leadership responsibilities with supervisors and delivering professional development opportunities to teachers. “Mid-level roles involve formal administrative functions such as supervision of field workers, implementation of policies, and the provision of professional development” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 5). Often, middle space leadership positions, roles, and responsibilities are reviewed and revised in order to meet the demands and needs of the school system; therefore, the consistent changes in the responsibilities of the role can be a challenge mentally and emotionally. Moshel and Berkovich (2020) explain that the “empirical evidence on these individuals’ views regarding the main challenge in assuming new mid-level managerial roles and their coping styles is scant” (p. 6).

The balance between desiring students to receive research-based initiatives and implementing managerial expectations that are expected from top leadership can cause middle space leaders to feel pressure. “The responsibility for achieving the goals and meeting expectations of both ends of the hierarchy are placed on the mid-level leaders’ shoulders, who find themselves engaging heavily in bridging the two sides” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 10). Often, higher-level leaders expect middle space leaders to complete supervisory demands, however, teachers and school-based leaders expect these leaders to work side-by-side and complete tasks that directly impact student learning. The balance between the two

expectations/demands can be tiresome and a burden on middle space leaders. “As a result, mid-level leaders must cope with the burden of overwhelming expectations from both top-level management and employees by using their discretion and filtering messages from above and below” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 10). Middle space leaders often experience complex dynamics due to the expectation of implementing, promoting, and delivering policies to the district that they did not create. This requires the middle space leader to keep the integrity of the new policies while nurturing the relationships with the school-level educators.

Middle space leaders often experience identity crises due to the challenges with balancing their expectations. Within one school day, a middle space leader may juggle multiple roles which can lead to the individual experiencing an identity crisis and not understanding exactly what is expected. This can also lead to middle space leaders feeling unsuccessful in their positions due to the constant changes in the day. “Individuals' perception of their identity affects their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and goals” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 12). Everyone needs to feel supported and validated. The feeling of insufficiency can lead to burnout and negative self-efficacy.

Burnout

The abundance of barriers the middle space leaders are facing on a daily basis is leading to an increase of middle space leaders experiencing professional burnout. “Burnout is one of several factors that contribute to principal turnover which often destabilizes a school community” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). But what exactly is burnout? “Job burnout can be thought of as a psychological process—a series of attitudinal and emotional reactions—that an employee goes through as a result of job-related and personal experiences” (Schwab et al., 1986, p. 14). Burnout, therefore, is the feeling of mental and emotional exhaustion due to the demands

of the profession. Richard Schwab explains a definition for burnout that includes three core components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and feelings of low accomplishment (Schwab et al., 1986, p. 14).

Consistent leadership is a key indicator for school systems to see student achievement. When leaders leave and middle space leadership positions face frequent turnover, this “translates into limited outcomes for students” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). The turnover rates within education are increasing daily. Burnout, therefore, needs to be addressed in the literature to determine a resolution to retain educators, including middle space leaders.

One of the reasons middle space leaders experience burnout is due to the compassion fatigue they experience because of secondary trauma. These leaders witness traumatic events secondhand through conversations or mediating conferences/professional developments and mitigate initiatives that are hindered due to the trauma experienced at the school level. A common finding is that leaders with compassion satisfaction tend to find enjoyment in their profession which does not lead to burnout. “Researchers in the mental health field have found evidence that professionals with higher levels of compassion satisfaction also have increased experience, specialized training, and positive coping and career-sustaining behaviors” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). This does not mean that middle space leaders who have compassion satisfaction will not experience secondary trauma, but they will have the coping strategies that will result in compassion satisfaction instead of compassion fatigue.

Stress is a factor leading to the burnout of middle space leaders. “In the US, about 51 percent of educators report experiencing stress several days per week” (Abenavoli et al., 2013, p. 57). Stress, emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and inconsistent expectations are many reasons why middle space leaders are experiencing burnout; however, these barriers are not

going to disappear. It is important for middle space leaders to become equipped with strategies to help improve their reactions to the barriers they are experiencing daily in order to eliminate the burnout rate. If the burnout middle space leaders are experiencing is not addressed, the turnover rates will continue to increase; therefore, it is critical for middle space leaders to begin practicing coping strategies for the stress they are experiencing.

One of the current strategies for improving educator burnout is mindfulness practices. “Recent work suggests that educators’ social-emotional competence may protect them from experiencing a burnout cascade of deteriorating classroom climate, student misbehavior, emotional exhaustion and callousness” (Abenavoli et al., p. 57). Mindfulness strategies can help middle space leaders reach a state of social-emotional competence by identifying the emotional triggers they are experiencing through their days and determining healthier ways to react to the stressors. If middle space leaders are unable to adapt to the ways they are reacting to the stressors presented daily within their profession, they will continue to experience burnout and the school systems they support will experience the side effects of their burnout.

Attention to Self-Care

Educators are public service professionals, similar to psychologists, serving individuals’ psychological, emotional, and cognitive needs. Educators must address a diverse array of student needs to improve the students’ academic success. Through the process of addressing the needs of students, educators may be experiencing secondary trauma, compassion fatigue and other negative side effects. Middle space leaders are experiencing similar side effects while interacting and supporting the educators that are serving the students’ needs, which is leading to them being “vulnerable to the effects of distress, which if left unchecked may lead to burnout, vicarious traumatization, and impaired professional competence” (Barnett & Cooper, 2009, p. 16). Self-

care has been emphasized as a preventative strategy of burnout, secondary trauma, and lack of job satisfaction for middle space leaders. If middle space leaders do not take care of themselves, they will not be able to adequately adhere to their profession's responsibilities. Too often, individuals are having to find a corrective approach to fix a mental health problem, however, self-care is a proactive approach to mental health. Middle space leaders who practice self-care are able "to be aware of the possible effects of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work" (Barnett & Cooper, 2009, p. 17).

Self-care is a necessity for mental health. "It is an essential component of prevention of distress, burnout, and impairment" (Barnett & Cooper, 2009, p. 17). Self-care should not be viewed as a luxury or only practiced when time is available. Individuals need to schedule time for self-care in order to support and improve their mental health. "Failure to adequately attend to self-care and the resultant impaired professional competence that may ensue place ourselves, our profession, and those we serve at risk" (Barnett & Cooper, 2009, p. 17). According to Barnett and Cooper (2009), educators are:

suffering from burnout or other professional impairment as a result of distress allowed to progress unchecked over time may experience a loss of objectivity and engage in harmful boundary violations; experience depression, anxiety, or other mental health difficulties to include even becoming suicidal; become irritated by clients or disinterested in their issues and needs; and may engage in a wide range of maladaptive coping strategies to include self-medicating with alcohol and other substances. (p. 17)

Self-care is critical for preventing educators from a destructive road of addictive coping strategies. If middle space leaders are practicing self-care regularly and placing value in

their self-care routines through protected time, they will be healthier mentally and emotionally.

One form of self-care is self-compassion, “self-compassion practice is a simple and effective way to model and practice self-care” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 2). According to Nelson et al. (2018), there are three components to self-compassion. “These components are self-kindness instead of self-judgement and criticism, common humanity instead of isolation, and mindfulness instead of over-identification with painful thoughts and emotions” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 3). Self-kindness is treating yourself the way you would treat someone close to you. “Self-kindness is the ability to be gentle and understanding with ourselves especially when we are experiencing some sort of turmoil” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 3). Giving yourself grace and compassion during difficult times is an important part of self-kindness. Many educators hold themselves to high standards; therefore, middle space leaders are often guilty of being harsh on themselves, which results in even more stress. A second component of self-compassion is common humanity, “recognizing our failings and sufferings as part of the human experience” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). Individuals often blame themselves for suffering and believe that something is wrong with them if they are suffering with something (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). “When we are practicing the principle of common humanity, we see that our pain, inadequacies, and failures are part of the human experiences” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). Common humanity also includes removing the judgement of self and others, which is the basic tenet of mindfulness practice. “We also begin to see the suffering of others around us as part of their human experience and not disconnect from them, label them or judge them” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). The third component of self-compassion is mindfulness. Mindfulness is being able to be aware your thoughts and feelings about events or scenarios without avoiding them, simply being aware of how we think and feel

and accepting those thoughts and feelings. “When we are mindful, we observe our thoughts and experience our feelings without judgement or applying meaning; we hold our painful feelings as part of our experience; we do not cling to them or run away from them” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). Instead of finding strategies to cope with negative emotions or thoughts, individuals who practice mindfulness acknowledge their emotions and thoughts without attachment. Mindfulness is not finding a fix for the feelings or thoughts that are present but allowing yourself to know them and feel them which is a form of self-care.

Stress as a Middle Space Leader

“It has been a common finding that educators experience higher levels of stress than other professional groups” (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 113). The media, community, and stakeholders highlight the negative movements within education because of the students, which adds pressure to the already intense responsibilities within the profession. “Pressure of school leaders also comes from trying to reconcile the conflicting expectations of different constituencies” (Hawk & Martin, 2011, p. 365). The presence of stress among educators is not a new finding. “A survey in 1933 revealed that 17 percent of educators were unusually nervous and that a further 11 percent had suffered a nervous breakdown” (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 113). The question behind the increase of stress within the field of education is centered around what is influencing the stress. “Research indicates that educators are faced with various stressors in the work environment, such as unsatisfactory working conditions, role conflict, learner misbehavior, the threat of redundancy, inadequate salaries and time pressures” (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 114). Middle space leaders tend to suffer stress due to the challenges of balancing the relational side of their positions and the task-oriented side of their positions. Middle space leaders often have

responsibilities that they are asked to complete by someone higher than them which results in the anxiety of juggling the delegated assignments and responsibilities of the position.

The stress educators are experiencing is resulting in a delay of initiatives proving as beneficial or not beneficial due to the lack of fidelity. “Prolonged teacher stress is hypothesized to impact classroom climate and the quality of teacher-student relationships, both considered core resources for effective teaching and student learning” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 60). Educators are not able to perform to their greatest ability when stressful circumstances approach. “Studies have found that teachers experiencing high rates of occupational stress are more likely to criticize their students, lose their temper, and resort to punitive discipline strategies when compared with teachers experiencing lower stress” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 59). The mental health of educators is crucial for the academic success of students. Many of the initiatives that are expected to be implemented across school districts may be counterproductive when the mental health of the educators is not a focus. The mental health of educators is decreasing while the expectation of student success is increasing, which further negatively impacts the mental health of educators. “Stress has been generally defined as an unpleasant emotional experience associated with feelings of anger, anxiety, tension, and frustration and linked with specific environmental triggers” (Shernoff et al., 2011, p. 59).

One consistent finding in the literature suggests that role-based stress is one of the main contributors to educational stress.

Role-based stress, which includes role conflicts and role ambiguity, exists when educators do not have clarity on their responsibility, expectations, or work objectives.

Role conflict arises when the school provides information about educators’ role and

responsibilities that conflict with the reality of daily professional life. (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 113)

Educators often take on “too many roles, for example, as counselors, social workers, managers, examiners and secretaries, on the one hand, and creative educators who are concerned with the performance of learners, on the other” (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 114) due to the expectation of educators supporting students in all ways. Educator stress also increases as they struggle to say “no” to any opportunity that would help students succeed even if it means forgoing opportunities to regenerate themselves.

The increase in workload on educators is a pivotal cause of occupational stress. The norms of education have intensified over the years and educators are expected to perform more duties each day. Educators are expected to document every moment of every day and are responsible for the academic, emotional, and social development of the students within the classrooms, schools, and/or districts they serve; therefore, the occupational stressors that are experienced each day are also increased. “Work demands have intensified and increasing numbers of people report that work demands are negatively affecting their health” (MacDonald, 2003, p. 1). With the increase of demands, educators are also feeling exhausted and fatigued. This is resulting in educators' stress levels increasing and less time for them to spend on self-care. Middle space leaders struggle to balance the time needed to focus on themselves and their self-care while juggling the increasing demands of their positions. Not only do middle space leaders struggle to take care of themselves, but they also feel the pressure to support and protect the wellbeing of the educators they serve within the district where they work; therefore, middle space leaders are feeling pressure from all angles. The workload can impact occupational

stressors; however, the amount of work alone is not the single cause of occupational stress. It is only one causal factor.

The stress educators experience daily is impacting their mental health, which has only increased since the genesis of Covid-19. The pandemic impacted the mental and emotional health of educators due to the overwhelming unclarity of events. Will the educator contract COVID-19? If they contract the virus, how severe will their cases be? Will the educator transmit the virus to their loved ones when they come home? If they contract the virus, will the educators have sick days to cover their quarantines? There are many aspects that cause stress for educators just pertaining to COVID-19. This does not include the daily stressors of their profession and responsibilities.

Educators assume multiple responsibilities and are expected to nurture and grow students and other educators while juggling distractions and diversions daily. These adversities are causing teachers to experience mental health instability. "Teachers are exposed daily to job stressors (e.g., student disruptiveness) that have been linked to adverse mental health effects" (Schonfeld, 2017, p. 56). Researchers have linked the stressors educators experience to "depressive and psychosomatic symptoms, alcohol consumption, and burnout" (Schonfeld, 2017, p. 56). The mental state of educators is a topic that must be addressed, or the academic success of students will be impacted. "Teachers experience mental health problems at a disproportionately high rate when compared to the rates found in other occupational groups" (Schonfeld, 2017, p. 56). The job stressors will not be removed; however, the mental health of educators must become a priority, or the consequences will impact education the students' futures. Middle space leaders are experiencing the same stressors teachers are experiencing; however, they are also

experiencing the stress of balancing and trying to reduce the number of stressors the teachers are experiencing.

Stress has been a topic in the United States for over fifty years. Beginning in 1936, Hans Selye recognized stress as General Adaptation Syndrome. Rosch (2015) notes that Selye “details how stress induces hormonal autonomic responses, and, over time, these hormonal changes can lead to ulcers, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis, arthritis, kidney disease, and allergic reactions” (p. 2). At the beginning of Hans Selye’s research, the word he used was “strain.” When his research was translated to other languages, however, the word did not translate with the same meaning; therefore, the word “stress” was used to represent the meaning behind Hans Selye’s research. According to Hans Selye, “stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand” (Selye, 1976, p. 2). The demand that causes the body to respond in a nonspecific way is the stressor. “The general adaptation syndrome (GAS) represents the chronological development of the response to stressors when their action is prolonged” (Selye, 1976, p. 3). This syndrome results in negative health due to the impact of the stressor on the body. This syndrome “consists of three phases: the alarm reaction, the state of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion” (Selye, 1976, p. 3). Even though Hans Selye began the research around stress and the impact stress has on the human body, researchers have continued his work by focusing on how stress is impacting the health of individuals. “It is widely accepted that this hard to define entity is hurting us, if not killing us outright” (Perdrizet, 1997, p. 214). Stressors in society are increasing daily, and they are impossible to avoid. According to Perdrizet (1997), however, when individuals are responding to stressors “there will be periods of sensitivity and resistance to stress which will be observed in a predictable fashion” (p. 215).

Stress has been in the literature for decades and is a term that is heard often and used commonly during conversations, but it can be difficult to describe because the definition is based on an individual's perception of what is stressful. "Writers on stress in the 1960s and early 1970s generally felt compelled to attempt to achieve (or impose) conceptual clarity, precision, uniformity. However, no one seems to have succeeded-- at least to anyone else's satisfaction or acquiescence" (Kasl, 1984, p. 320). Researchers have been trying to turn the conceptual confusions around the idea of stress into a scientific concept and form a formal theory to identify the connections to constructs (Kasl, 1984, p. 320).

The impact of stress is evident through many studies. According to Hawk and Martin (2011), stress is the body's nonspecific response to stressors in the environment. Stress is the cognitive and physical wear and tear that we experience as we live our lives (Hawk & Martin, 2011). Long-term exposure to stressful experiences tends to lead to a chronic state of tension and strain on the body's systems. These experiences can lead to diseases and negative health.

Stress can lead to health deterioration, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety. A study done of "560 female educators in the Northwest Province attempted to determine the occurrence of burnout among female educators. They found that almost one-third of educators suffered from a high degree of emotional exhaustion" (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 115). Some of the findings from this study suggest that the educator's emotional exhaustion was due to student-to-teacher ratios, excessive class sizes, responsibility overload, lack of resources, and lack of job security. "There is a direct relationship between the stress experienced by educators and their general health" (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 127). Another study found that "a very high percentage of educators (67.1%) reported above-average levels of stress" (Steyn & Kamper, 2006, p. 115). Similar to the previous study, the patterns leading to the stress were time pressure, administrative

issues, political challenges, and poor working conditions. The term “educator stress” encompasses the findings of the studies stated above which lead to physical and psychological impacts surrounding the daily professional responsibilities and fast-paced challenges throughout a single day.

Often stress can lead to emotional experiences. The responsibilities and on-the-job experiences middle space leaders have can lead to negative health physically, socially, and mentally (including emotionally). “For many years, emotions were characterized as irrational, and, as such, delegitimize in the workplace” (Berkovich, & Eyal, 2015, p. 2). In the 1990s, researchers began studying emotions in the educational leadership field, but information has been underdeveloped due to misconceptions surrounding emotions. In recent years, this reputation has faded due to an increasing number of educational leaders speaking about their varied emotional experiences during their professional careers in education. “Emotions have been found to be a key psychological aspect in determining cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in the workplace” (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015, p. 2).

Educational leaders, including middle space leaders, were experiencing increased amounts of occupational stress long before the pandemic. “Across America, [educators] are charged with leading schools with diminished resources, increased expectations for student achievement, changing demographics, and increased accountability and connectivity often referred to as ‘24/7’ access from central office personnel, parents, students, and school board members” (Wells, 2013, p. 335). Society has created an expectation for the easiness of communication. “Principals are connected with instant communication, and as a result, they receive email and text messages from parents, teachers, and central office staff” (Wells, 2013, p. 335). This instant communication impacts the stress of all educators. Managing their time and

self-care is often not prioritized due to the overabundance of items on their to-do lists and the obstacles that are being thrown at them daily. This results in stress-related illnesses.

“Occupational stress has been linked to myriad health and psychological complaints, including headaches, high blood pressure, sleeping difficulties, heart palpitations, heart attacks, dizzy spells, breathing problems, nervous stomach, anxiety, and depression” (Wells, 2013, p. 338). The health of educators has always been a growing concern. “Research articles from three decades revealed descriptions of the principalship that were filled with concerns for the levels of stress that principals encounter on a daily basis” (Wells, 2013, p. 338). Education is a stressful profession in part due to the cost of care and the passion educators have towards helping students be successful. Unfortunately, the cost of caring can lead to the deterioration of the educator's health. “Stress within the teaching profession has a negative impact on the health and well-being of individual teachers and on retention and recruitment for the profession as a whole” (Gold et al., 2010, p.184). “Within the field of education, several studies have explored the increasing levels of stress that teachers experience, the consequences on their health and careers, and ultimately on retention and recruitment” (Gold et al., 2010, p.184).

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

Occupational stress is a growing problem across the nation and is often referred to as an epidemic. It is crucial that the topic is addressed and that interventions are provided and practiced to decrease educator occupational stress. According to Quick and Henderson (2016), “stress is directly linked to seven of the ten leading causes of death in the world, with cardiovascular disease being the leading cause for both men and women” (p. 1). There is much confusion around stress and how some stress can provide “mental stimulation” or “arousal and activation” (Kasl, 1984, p. 320). Kasl (1984) discusses the idea that there may be health benefits

of experiencing the right level of stress. There are, however, healthier ways to reach the mental stimulation discussed above because it is unrealistic to expect stressors to be removed from the equation. Coping is essentially the response in the effort to reduce the symptoms related to stress or to minimize the detriments that result from stress. Finding ways to reduce the way your body and mind react to stressors is a more impactful way to cope. If an individual does not have effective coping skills, there is a tendency for stress to remain or continue to increase (Hawk & Martin, 2011, p. 365).

For middle space leaders to reduce the impact of stress on their health, they must improve their well-being. Well-being can be described as happy, comfortable, positive, and healthy. Well-being does not include removing the stressors in life but simply learning how to cope with the stressors to reach a state of well-being and positivity. Reaching a state of well-being requires training one's brain to remove the negative thoughts centered around the stressors in life and focus on positivity. This is referred to as positive psychology practices. "Positive psychology examines positive traits such as courage, perseverance, spirituality, wisdom, and [forgiveness]" (Quick & Henderson, 2016, p. 2). To measure someone's state of well-being, the Satisfaction with Life Scale is often used. This helps explain the definition of well-being by highlighting the viewpoint of someone in a state of well-being being satisfied with life.

Finding a source of stress management is one of the steps towards building social and emotional capacity. These capacities are dependent on the individual's ability to process their surroundings and balance the stressors present through practices that increase the consciousness of self. Consciousness in this sense, however, is more than being awake because it pertains to being cognitively and emotionally aware of your surroundings. "Consciousness encompasses both awareness and attention" (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 3). Being aware of your actions and the

actions of others is the first step of being conscious. Simply being conscious is not enough to reduce the stress that is impacting the social and emotional health of leaders. “Attention is a process of focusing conscious awareness, providing heightened sensitivity to a limited range of experience” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 3).

Even though stress is referred to as a negative experience due to the negative impact stress has had on the body and health of individuals, “countless people have actually suffered or benefitted from it” (Selye, 1985, p. 2). Stress is not avoidable, and individuals can benefit from stress when they are able to transform the impact stress has on them. It is important to understand the impact stress has on the human body, and it is also crucial for educators to understand how to process the stressors and begin reducing the impacts of the stressors by utilizing stress-reduction techniques. A stress reduction practice that is growing in popularity is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a clinical program developed over 25 years ago has gradually gained recognition as an important means of teaching people how to live their lives fully whether they are patients with chronic illness, health professionals, community members dealing with the stressors inherent in life, students, prisoners, or priest. (Dobkin, 2008, p. 8)

Research around Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction has become increasingly common. Dobkin (2008) conducted a study in which the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) was used to determine the impact mindfulness practices had on the participants. The result of the study showed that the participants “became more mindful, took better care of themselves, and tended to view life as more meaningful and manageable” (Dobkin, 2008, p. 9).

Middle space leaders experiencing stress due to job-related stressors are experiencing an increase of negative health and well-being. There is much in the literature to support the implementation of mindfulness practices as stress reduction and improvement in mental and psychological problems (Gold et al., 2010, p. 185). Mindfulness has been used to improve anxiety, depression, and stress resulting in improving emotional and mental health. Mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques help by training the individual's attention “through straight forward, secular, meditation techniques” (Gold et al., 2010, p. 185). This strategy is meant to help improve the way individuals are impacted by stressful thoughts and events by changing the way they react to emotional and stressful experiences. “Mindfulness training leads to a fundamental change in relationship to experience (reperceiving), which leads to changes in self-regulation, values clarification, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, and exposure” (Carmody, 2009, p. 1). A study conducted by Gold et al. (2010) explored the impacts of mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques on primary school teachers. The results of the study, using the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS), showed a significant increase in the scale from pre- and-post test scores of participants. The study focused on stress, depression, and anxiety teachers were experiencing, and the results of the pretest showed that all participating teachers were experiencing emotional distress, and most of the participants “experienced reductions in stress, depression, and anxiety as a result of participating in the MBSR course” (Gold, 2010, p. 185).

Mindfulness is growing in popularity as a technique for focusing one’s consciousness and attention to reduce the stress.

Mindfulness captures a quality of consciousness that is characterized by clarity and vividness of current experiences and functioning and thus stands in contrast to the

mindless, less awake states of habitual or automatic functioning that may be chronic for many individuals. (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 5)

Mindfulness refers to the capability of being aware of the present moment without judgment or striving; it means paying attention to purpose (Wells, 2013). Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to experience a reduced reaction towards stressors by being aware of how the body is reacting before the side effects happen by visualizing and seeing what is causing their reaction. “Mindfulness meditation includes seeing life and reality exactly as they are, becoming aware of thoughts and feelings and noting them as such” (Wells, 2013, p. 340). Leaders who practice mindfulness tend to be better leaders because they are more compassionate and supportive of their teachers as a result of being focused and in the present moment. “Mindfulness meditation encourages compassion and open-mindedness, qualities that can cultivate empathy and understanding” (Wells, 2013, p. 340). Being in the moment helps reduce stress because while outside stressors may still be present, the individual is not allowing them to impact the present moment. “By paying attention to the moment and being aware of reactive patterns, mindfulness also contributes to being less reactive” (Wells, 2013, p. 341). Therefore, when leaders are practicing mindfulness, they tend to be less reactive to the stressors of their occupation and are able to focus on the areas of need with peace and ease.

Mindfulness is practiced in multiple different ways and with multiple strategies. To reach a true state of mindfulness, however, there are aspects to consider. “In essence, mindfulness includes three axioms: intentions, attention, and attitude” (Wells, 2013, p. 341). An individual who practices mindfulness should know the purpose or the intention for the mindful practice. The intention refers to the ability to pay attention to the current moment, focused, and without distraction. There is no judgment of oneself if there are distractions. One simply refocuses on the

mindful practice. The attitude refers to the actions of practicing mindfulness and knowing how the participant will try to reach a state of mindfulness. Mindfulness practice tends to have a calming effect and “has been correlated with numerous health benefits” (Wells, 2013).

Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to experience attention benefits, improved sleep patterns, feeling calm, and many more psychological and physical improvements. Mindfulness can help change a reaction to a stressor. “Rather than over-reacting to tense situations, the practice of responding can bring a sense of calm” (Wells, 2013, p. 341). Individuals who are focused on the moment and aware of their feelings towards certain stressors who allow the negative feelings to come and go react to the stressors in a healthier manner. “Mindfulness practice actually trains the brain to have new methods to experiences and thoughts, ones that weaken existing overreactions to events and situations, and to have ways to strengthen those responses that create less anxiety” (Wells, 2013, p. 342).

Mindfulness is having the ability to be aware of what is happening in the present moment, which removes the reaction of overreacting and becoming overwhelmed. The action of being mindful has been used as an intervention to medical conditions through Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction. “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is a clinical program originally developed to facilitate adaptation to medical illness that provides systematic training in mindfulness meditation as a self-regulation approach to stress reduction and emotion management” (Bishop, 2002, p. 71). This technique helps individuals manage their emotions and reactions during stressful situations by regulating their awareness of reality during the present moment and accepting and acknowledging the situation.

Mindfulness allows the participant to develop the ability to calmly step back from the thoughts and feelings during stressful situations, rather than engaging in anxious worry of

other negative-thinking patterns that might otherwise escalate a cycle of stress reactivity and contribute to heightened emotional distress. (Bishop, 2002, p. 71)

Mindfulness-based stress reduction allows individuals to change their reactions to stressful situations, thoughts, or incidents by being aware of emotional reactions and transitioning to positivity over time.

Mindfulness helps regulate emotions which leads to an improvement in social and emotional health. “Emotional Intelligence is defined [by]... the ability to act effectively in the context of emotions and emotionally charged thoughts and use emotions as information” (Ciarrochi & Godsell, 2005, p. 2). By practicing mindfulness, individuals can become increasingly aware of their emotions, which leads to the ability to use their emotions for improvements rather than allowing them to cause stress. Emotional intelligence has multiple definitions but is often referred to as the “ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about oneself that leads to our cause's effective or superior performance” (McCleskey, 2014, p. 78). Individuals who are emotionally intelligent tend to be socially and emotionally healthy. Often “having a broad repertoire of emotional intelligence skills and expressing positive emotions tend to enhance the performance of the individual, the group, and the entire organization- sometimes in subtle ways that are difficult to detect” (Brown et al., 2015, p. 4).

Positive emotions can impact self-compassion and empathy. “Self-compassion involves feelings of caring and kindness towards oneself in the face of personal suffering and involves the recognition that one’s suffering, failures, and inadequacies are part of the human condition” (Birnie et al., 2010, p. 2). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction is commonly used to improve the emotions and self-compassion of individuals. When people are self-compassionate, they tend to

be more compassionate to others and to display empathy. Mindfulness “is a more general practice as it applies to enhanced awareness of all experience including sensory awareness of the body, of sound, sight, smell, taste and awareness of passing thoughts and emotions: not just the experience of suffering” (Birnie et al., 2010, p. 2). Mindfulness practices help individuals become aware of experiences that cause suffering and stress but turn the awareness into empathetic thoughts, which helps them become positively impactful to others.

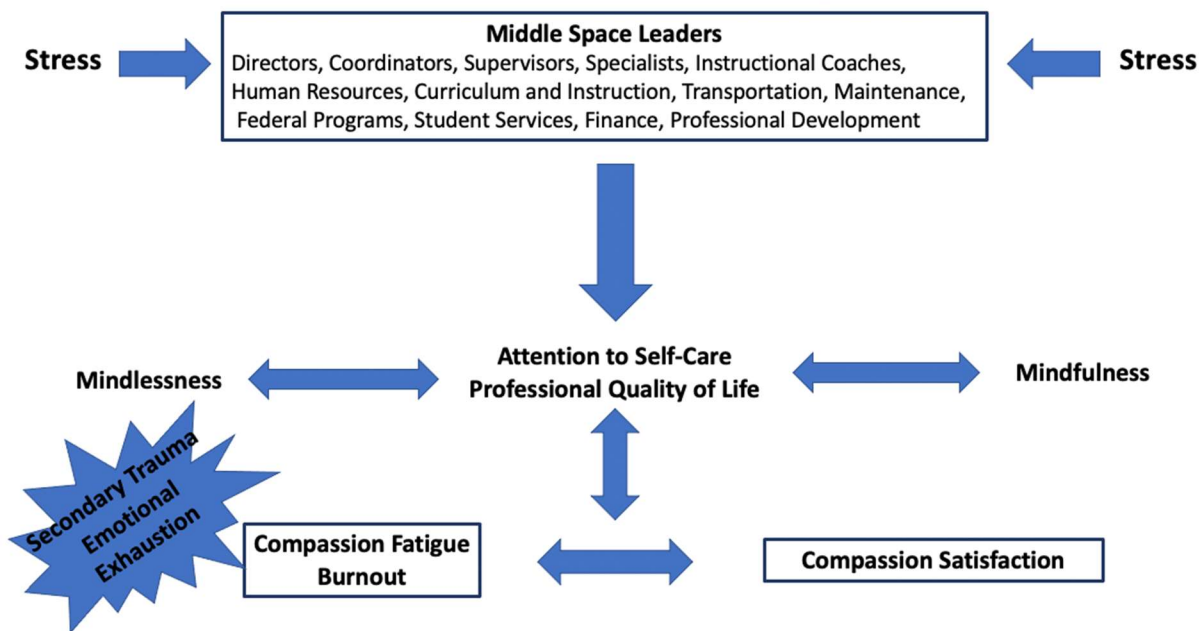
One reason educators seek leadership positions is to improve the experiences of teachers and students due to their love of learning. For that reason, the risk of stress and emotional exhaustion is perceived to be worth the outcomes of increasing love for learning across the population of students and other educators. For students and teachers to love learning, however, the leaders must lead in a positive and supportive way. Positive leadership involves improving the emotional outcomes of experiences. These leaders are concerned about their colleagues' personal growth as well as the outcomes of initiatives. For middle space leaders to be positive leaders, there must be a focus on their social and emotional health through improving their stress reactions. Middle space leaders are a pivotal part of teachers' and students' daily experiences. They are the connecting piece between the central office and the schools. Therefore, it is crucial for middle space leaders to be mentally and emotionally healthy in order to support the teachers, principals, and students of the school districts they serve. Mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques are beneficial to professionals who experience feelings of stress, exhaustion, fatigue, and burnout. Leaders cannot pour from an empty cup. Mindfulness practices allow leaders to focus on the present time and their feelings, emotions, and experiences. The relationship between mindfulness practices and professional quality of life can provide a supportive approach to the retention of middle space leaders.

Mindfulness can help improve an individual’s well-being by helping them associate with higher quality or optimal moment-to-moment experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Being more aware of the senses in a situation results in an overall improved state of well-being and social-emotional health. A study conducted by Brown and Ryan (2003) with the goal of determining the correlations between mindfulness and well-being suggests that mindfulness is a reliable and validly measured characteristic of an individual's mental health. When individuals are present and aware of their thoughts and emotions, they are healthier mentally and emotionally, which results in a state of well-being.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 2

Middle Space Leader Professional Quality of Life



Middle space leaders are educators who serve in leadership capacities at the central offices across school systems in America. These leaders serve many educators through different

avenues due to the variety of populations they are serving. “A growing body of research highlights a range of tensions in middle leadership with regard to the inherent difficulties for the role holder in trying to fulfill varied and often conflicting demands” (Branson et al., 2016, p. 2). When a middle space leader is acknowledging a request or need from a school leader (principal or assistant principal), the approach will be different than when the middle space leader is supporting a teacher in a classroom setting. Middle space leaders are supporting educators within their districts through different approaches. They are responsible for implementing initiatives across the district that will encourage student achievement. “After superintendents and school boards establish new policies, mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like “improving literacy district-wide “or “closing the achievement gap” into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 3). Professional developments are planned and implemented by these leaders. Many middle space leaders are working more hours a day than their contracted time. Most middle space leaders go above and beyond their contracted expectations because they want their school systems and students to be successful. There are many areas that experience consequences due to the overworked and overtired outcome of middle space leader’s role. These leaders experience a decrease in their satisfaction of responsibilities, compassion fatigue, and burnout which leads to a decrease in their professional quality of life.

The size of the school system the middle space leader supports impacts the amount of work the middle space leader juggles. That does not mean, however, that the middle space leader is not experiencing a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities, compassion fatigue, or burnout due to the stress the profession presents. Educators are passionate about student achievement and strive to learn and support students to encourage success. The size of the school

system does not change the impact middle space leaders experience due to the emotional and social exhaustion felt at the end of their days. Most of the time, larger school systems support more schools, however, the amount of support at the central office is larger due to the number of students, teachers, and school leaders who are needing support.

Many middle space leaders experience doubt and inconsistent support. This tends to lead to middle space leaders feeling a decrease in the satisfaction of their responsibilities because they feel like they are not impactful in their positions. “The responsibility for achieving the goals and meeting expectations of both ends of the hierarchy are placed on the mid-level leaders’ shoulders, who find themselves engaging heavily in bridging the two sides” (Moshel & Berkovich, 2020, p. 5). Continuing to be consistent with the support offered is difficult when middle space leaders experience self-doubt. The decrease in middle space leaders’ self-efficacy tends to result in a decline of the quality of their support offered to the educators they serve in their school system. As the decrease in the quality persists, the amount of doubt these leaders experience increases, which causes a continuous cycle of decreased satisfaction.

Middle space leaders collaborate and interact with teachers, students, and administrators from differing backgrounds and vicariously experience their trauma through interactions and conversations. Compassion fatigue is when an individual experiences emotional, physical, and social side effects from helping others. This often happens when the individual is carrying a burden from trauma or emotional experiences that another person has experienced. “Researchers in the mental health field have found evidence that professionals with higher levels of compassion satisfaction also have increased experience, specialized training, and positive coping and career-sustaining behaviors” (DeMatthews et al, p. 2). Middle space leaders often experience compassion fatigue due to the overwhelming amount of support they offer to students, teachers,

and other educators who are experiencing trauma or educational burdens. This has been increased since the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the school systems and education.

When middle space leaders experience a decrease in their satisfaction of responsibilities and compassion fatigue, they often experience feelings of burnout. These feelings make middle space leaders lack the motivation needed to continue supporting the students, teachers, and leaders within the district they support due to overwhelming emotional and social fatigue. These feelings are due to the abundance of stress they are experiencing throughout their daily experiences. Middle space leaders do not always quit when they experience burnout, however, their productivity and the quality of their support often decreases due to these overwhelming feelings of stress and exhaustion.

The professional quality of life middle space leaders experience or their perceptions of job satisfaction is impacted by the stress, compassion fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of burnout that are experienced daily throughout their jobs; however, when middle space leaders put a focus on their self-care, there are strategies that can help reduce the instances of burnout and exhaustion. Middle space leaders who practice self-care are able “to be aware of the possible effects of their own physical and mental health on their ability to help those with whom they work” (Barnett & Cooper, 2009, p. 17). There are different ways to practice self-care, however, mindfulness practices are a form of self-care that also reduce the body’s response to stress through mindfulness-based stress reduction. “When we are mindful, we observe our thoughts and experience our feelings without judgement or applying meaning; we hold our painful feelings as part of our experience; we do not cling to them or run away from them” (Nelson et al., 2018, p. 4). The goal of this study was to take the literature that is circling around the barriers of middle space leaders, such as the satisfaction of their responsibilities, compassion fatigue, burnout,

educator stress, and mindfulness practices, and makes a connection between the professional quality of life, focusing on the satisfaction of responsibility, compassion fatigue, and burnout of middle space leaders, and addresses the relationship between mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques and the overall professional quality of life of middle space leaders.

Chapter III: Methodology

There are various leadership roles in education. Superintendents and board members hold higher level leadership positions. Principals and assistant principals hold school-based leadership positions. Middle space or mid-level leaders help implement initiatives and procedures from the higher-level leaders into the school systems they serve. Middle space leaders are often stuck between decision-making leadership roles and colleagues that are seeking answers or support.

Middle space leaders are often overworked and overstressed. The middle space position consists of inconsistent circumstances that tend to lead to unstable feelings which can, over time, lead to these leaders experiencing an increase in stress and a decrease in health. Middle space leaders experience stress daily. There is a need to focus on the social and emotional health of these leaders; otherwise, the profession will lose the passionate and impactful leaders which can result in the decrease the retention of teachers, as well. The researcher read and analyzed ample amounts of literature about middle space leaders and mindfulness. The conceptual framework for this study addressed the amount of stress middle space leaders experience due to the inconsistent demands they face daily and how this impacts the retention of educators while also addressing the professional quality of life of the participants. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction techniques have on an individual's perceptions of stress and how they can cope with the stressful experiences faced daily while improving their professional quality of life.

Research Design

The study was designed using quantitative methodology to explore the relationship between mindfulness and quality of life. The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale was used to measure mindfulness and the Professional Quality of Life Scale and its three subscales

(compassion satisfaction, burnout and compassion fatigue) were used to support job satisfaction. The study is designed to determine if there is a relationship between mindfulness and job satisfaction.

Research Question

1. To what extent is there a relationship between the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)?
 - a. To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life /Compassion Satisfaction?
 - b. To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life /Burnout?
 - c. To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue?

Role of the Researcher

Before the researcher finished this study, she had never served as a school level administrator; however, she was serving in a middle space leadership position within a public-school district in Alabama which served schools in urban, rural, and suburban areas with diverse needs. She had also served as an educator within multiple different schools and in different school systems holding responsibilities related to curriculum and instruction. She currently serves as an elementary school assistant principal in a public school system in the state of Alabama.

Significance of the Study

Educators are overworked and overstressed due to growing responsibilities and unrealistic expectations. Middle space leaders in school districts bear many of the burdens of the

educators within their districts due to being the bridge between schools and the higher leaders in the school system. Research by Burch and Spillane (2004) suggests that “mid-level managers have significant impacts on how district reform policies are understood and acted on by school leaders” (p. 3). The higher leaders in school systems, such as superintendents and school board members, are often the people who are responsible for creating and approving new initiatives within the district. Middle space leaders are responsible, however, for initiating the steps that are needed to implement the new policies and initiatives throughout their districts. “Mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 3). Initiating these transformations and initiatives is what supports the growth of school systems but takes a lot of planning and preparation to successfully implement. This study is significant because it will add to the body of literature that supports the need of stress reduction techniques and how they can improve the mental and emotional health of middle space leaders by addressing the reaction of stress among these leaders. This study will support the focus of the professional quality of life of educators and how it is an important aspect for the retention of educators.

Participants

This study included a sampling of 100-150 middle space leaders in public school systems across the State of Alabama. The researcher administered the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) to middle space leaders across the state. Websites were visited to determine the names and email addresses of possible participants. School systems with publicly listed contact information were selected for the study. The participants represented middle-space leaders from various departments of the central

offices of rural, urban, and suburban school districts. The process continued until the 100-150 participant pool was populated. The experience levels of the participants varied due to the diverse representation of central office middle space leaders.

The study did not have any research questions to address demographics; however, the survey had demographic questions to identify the gender, age, experience, race, departments, and roles that the respondents represented. There were 77 female respondents (73%) and 28 male respondents (26%). The mean age of the respondents was 47 years, which is represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Age Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	46.7	9.30

The number of years of experience in a middle space leadership position was determined by a range: 0-3 years, 4-10 years, 11-20 years, or 21+ years. The mean range of experience in a middle space leadership position was 2.5 which falls within the 4-10 years of experience. This is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Experience Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	2.51	0.982

77% of the respondents identified as White or Caucasian, 20.9% of the respondents identified as Black or African American, .9% of the respondent identified as American Indian or Alaskan

Native, and 1.9% of the respondents identified as other. 11% of the respondents identified to work in the human resources department, 29% of the respondents identified to work in the curriculum and instruction department, 10% of the respondents identified to work in the federal programs department, 6.6% of the respondents identified to work in the student services department, .9% of the respondent identified to work in the facilities and maintenance department, 7.6% of the respondents identified to work in the technology department, 9.5% of the respondents identified to work within the special education department, and 23% of the respondents identified to work within a department that was not listed in the survey within their school system. Among the respondents 31% of the respondents were specialists, 7% were supervisors, 19% were coordinators, 35% were directors, and 5% were assistant superintendents.

Data Collection

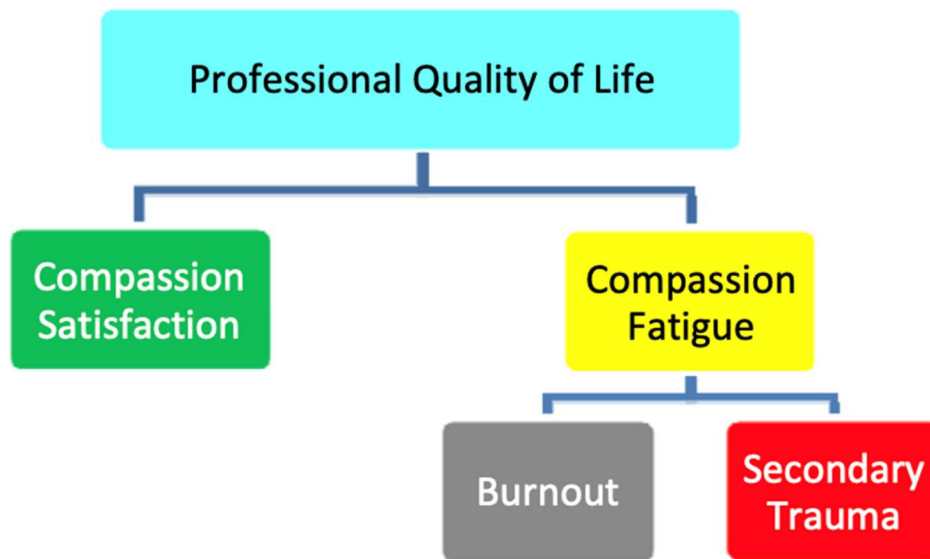
After reviewing and signing their informed consent letters informing them of their rights of privacy and rights to terminate their participation at any time, the participants of this study completed two surveys that were combined into one survey for the convenience of the participants. The first survey the participants completed was The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) survey. The second survey the participants completed was the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The two surveys were combined into one survey that was administered through Qualtrics.

The original version of the Professional Quality of Life scale contained thirty items which measured the compassion fatigue, work satisfaction, and burnout of the middle space leaders through a 1-5 Likert scale. Professional Quality of Life is determined by addressing the positive components of the profession (Compassion Satisfaction) and the negative components of the profession (Compassion Fatigue and Burnout) (Stamm, 2010). Many individuals who are

experiencing compassion fatigue will show symptoms of “exhaustion, frustration, anger and depression typical of burnout” (Stamm, 2010, Pg. 8); therefore, the Professional Quality of Life Scale was developed to highlight themes relating to compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction to determine an individual’s Professional Quality of Life.

Figure 3

Diagram of Professional Quality of Life



Note: Stamm, B. (2010, p. 8). The concise manual for the professional quality of life scale.

The Professional Quality of Life Scale is the survey used most often to determine the effects of secondary trauma among employees who serve others who have experienced trauma. “Of the 100 papers in the PILOTS database (the Published Literature in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder), 46 used a version of the ProQOL” (Stamm, 2010, Pg. 12). The survey was originally created by Charles Figley in the 1980s and was referred to as the Compassion Fatigue Self-Test (Stamm, 2010). As versions of the scale adapted, Beth Stamm (2010) “added the concept of compassion satisfaction and the name of the measure changed to the Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Test” in 1993 (p. 12). In the late 1990s, Charles Figley released ownership of the

survey to Beth Stamm, and she became the single contributor to the Professional Quality of Life Scale (Stamm, 2010). The Professional Quality of Life scale underwent multiple revisions to develop the most effective measures of determining the amount of compassion satisfaction, burnout, and compassion fatigue of professionals who are experiencing stress or traumatic events either directly (personal trauma) or indirectly (secondary trauma). This revision removed thirty-six sample items from the survey, leaving thirty items; however, Laura Galiana et al. (2020) conducted a study on the professional quality of life of medical professionals using a 9-item version of the Professional Quality of Life Scale which created the IV and V versions of the scale. Within this shortened version of the Professional Quality of Life Scale, the following same three constructs were used: burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction. The shortened version uses the same 1-5 Likert scale approach, as well.

Laura Galiana et al. (2020) determined which items to use within their shortened survey by using Stamm's (2010) definitions of burnout, compassion fatigue, and compassion satisfaction and by using the reliability of the questions determined through previous studies. For burnout, the researchers chose items 10, 19, and 21. It was determined that these three items had the highest factor loading (Laura Galiana et al., 2020). When determining which items to select to determine compassion fatigue, similar processes were taken. The researchers determined items 9, 13, and 25 were the most adequate items for measure compassion fatigue because they were the items that "specifically measure the traumatic experiences of others (items 9 and 13) and of experiencing symptoms that mimic those observed in the traumatized individuals such as intrusive, frightening thoughts (item 25)" (Galiana et al., 2020, p. 3). When determining which items to select to measure compassion satisfaction, the same study was used as burnout and compassion fatigue. Still, the definition Stamm (2010) used for compassion satisfaction was used

to make sure the three items were the best items that supported the "measuring satisfaction with one's work in general (items 18 and 30) and specifically with helping others (item 12)" (Galiana et al., 2020, p. 4).

Each construct for the Professional Quality of Life scale results in different distributions. The Compassion Satisfaction Scale typically is skewed toward the positive side and the compassion fatigue/trauma is skewed toward the absent side (most people report little disruption) (Stamm, 2010). The reliability of the original 30-item scale for burnout is 0.75, for compassion fatigue is 0.81, and for compassion satisfaction is 0.88 (Stamm, 2010); however, with the shorter, 9-item version of the ProQOL, the reliability of burnout is 0.834, the reliability of compassion fatigue is 0.821, and the reliability for compassion satisfaction is 0.843 (Galiana et al., 2020). The validity of the original 30-item scale was determined based on the use of the scale in over 200 peer-reviewed publications.

When scoring the 1-5 Likert Professional Quality of Life Scale, it is important for the researcher to use the manual for guidance. The higher the score, the more likely the participant is experiencing feelings of burnout, compassion fatigue, or compassion satisfaction. Each construct represents different scores. The mean score of the Compassion Satisfaction construct is 37. The higher the score, the greater probability of the professional experiencing a satisfaction in his/her career. The mean score of the Burnout construct is 22. If the participant scores below 18, they are most likely experiencing positive feelings towards their profession and their ability to be successful with their work. If the participant's score is higher than 22, they are likely experiencing feelings of ineffectiveness relating to their job. The mean score of the Compassion Fatigue/Secondary Trauma construct is 13. If the participants score above 17, they may be experiencing some form of fear related to the trauma or stress experienced in their profession.

“While higher scores do not mean that you have a problem, they are an indication that you may want to examine how you feel about your work and your work environment” (Stamm, 2010, p. 18).

The participants also completed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) survey to measure the frequency an individual experiences a state of mindfulness. The MAAS was used to measure the extent of mindfulness in the middle space leader participants. This 15-item scale was designed to determine the receptiveness of mindfulness using a 1-6 scale (1- almost always, 2- very frequently, 3- somewhat frequently, 4- somewhat frequently, 5- very frequently, 6- almost never).

Studies suggest that mindfulness-based interventions are hard to measure due to the self-reporting and biases related to the reporting processes. Borders (2010) states, “dramatic variations in operationalizations of mindfulness have led some to question whether scales of ‘mindfulness’ measure the same construct” (p. 806). There have been “several concerns with self-reported mindfulness, including issues of scale construction, potential bias, and item miscomprehension” (Van Dam et al., 2010, p. 806). This led to researchers questioning the validity of mindfulness-based scales. “The MAAS (Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale) is a possible exception to the construct representation problem, with a specific cognitive theory related to scale development” (Van Dam et al., 2010, p. 806).

When creating the MAAS, Brown and Ryan (2003) created items that not only focused on mindfulness but mindlessness, as well. “Items were drafted to reflect the experience of mindfulness and mindlessness in general terms as well as in specific day-to-day circumstances, including variations in awareness of and attention to actions, interpersonal communication, thoughts, emotions, and physical states” (p. 825). There were many steps and processes taken

when developing the items within the MAAS to help create the strongest version of the survey, including removing any items that would measure the participants “motivational intent (the ‘why’ of awareness or attention)” instead of the mindfulness or mindlessness state (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 825). Brown and Ryan (2003) submitted the items that survived the reduction process to “nine experienced practitioners of mindfulness who were provided with ‘their’ exclusion criteria and a brief working definition of ‘their’ constructs” (p. 825). The professionals then rated the constructs using a Likert scale approach to determine adequacy of each item. Brown and Ryan (2003) only retained items that rated high and reliable using the Likert scale. Once the items were rated by the professional practitioners of mindfulness, Brown and Ryan (2003) submitted the items for review of graduate students and professors of psychology to guarantee the items were “clear, understandable, and applicable to the life experiences of the average adult” (p. 825). In a study conducted by Brown and Ryan (2003), a Keiser measure had an adequacy score of .89. This led to a factor analysis conducted on the study utilizing the MAAS (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Van Dam et al. (2010) researched the validity of the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and found that it “is one of the most popular measures of mindfulness” (p. 805). The scale uses a “polytomous response format (e.g., a six-point rating scale), with graded response options” (Van Dam et al., 2010, p.806). When scoring the 1-6 Likert scale Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale, the higher the score the participants have means they likely are experiencing a state of mindfulness more frequently. The graded response options eliminate the chances of discrimination parameters with participants responses which improves the validity of the scale. By utilizing the two different surveys, combined into one, the researcher will be able to identify the relationship of mindfulness and job satisfaction for middle space leaders.

Analysis

Once the researcher of this study collected 100-150 survey responses, the relevance of the surveys was analyzed through a quantitative data analysis tool, SPSS. Using this data analysis tool, the researcher looked for a Pearson correlation between the professional quality of life and mindfulness. The researcher analyzed the data to determine the mean of the sample items scored with the Likert scale for each construct in relationship to the MAAS: compassion satisfaction and mindfulness, burnout and mindfulness, and compassion fatigue and mindfulness. Also, the researcher determined the percentage of participants who showed a relationship between the three variables and mindfulness. Figure 3 shows how the researcher aligned the research questions with the survey items. The survey responses were used to identify the relationship between the professional quality of life of middle space leaders and mindfulness.

Figure 4

Research Question Matrix

Research Question	Variables	Survey Items	Analysis of the Data
To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)?	Compassion Fatigue	ProQOL items 9, 13, 25 MAAS items 1-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pearson Correlation • Mean • Standard Deviation
	Burnout	ProQOL items 10, 19, 21 MAAS items 1-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pearson Correlation • Mean • Standard Deviation
	Compassion Satisfaction	ProQOL items 12, 18, 30 MAAS items 1-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pearson Correlation • Mean • Standard Deviation

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the relationship of mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders in school districts across Alabama. Specifically, the study helped determine the professional quality of life of middle space leaders, as measured by the Professional Quality of Life survey and how the dimensions of job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout are related to mindfulness. Thus, the research question was: To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

- a) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue?
- b) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Burnout?
- c) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction?

This chapter includes an overview of the design of the study, the data collection process, the role of the researcher, and the results of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process included conducting, analyzing, and interpreting two data sets collected using one survey via Qualtrics. Two instruments were utilized in this study and combined into the same survey with one measuring professional quality of life and the other measuring mindfulness. The instrument used to measure the professional quality of life was the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), and the instrument used to measure mindfulness

was the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Demographic information (years of experience, area of educational focus, gender, age, and ethnicity) was also collected to explore any relationships to mindfulness and professional quality of life. The survey was emailed to 1,728 K-12 public school middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. Four follow-up emails were sent during the survey administration period to gather data. Returned responses were collected from 109 individuals, with 104 usable responses from middle space leaders answering every question for a useable rate of 6.3%.

The researcher compiled a list of emails by visiting the websites of every public school system in Alabama. There are 138 public school systems in Alabama. The survey was sent to directly to middle space leaders at 100 Alabama public school systems because 38 systems did not have publicly listed contact information on their school systems' websites. Several emails were returned as undelivered and corrections to email addresses were made, when possible, but many of the undelivered responses were due to the middle space leader no longer being employed by the system. The response rate was also negatively impacted by some districts having protocols in place requiring outside individuals conducting surveys to request approval through a central office administrator. The researcher did submit requests through the districts requesting this process, however, only one district responded with the approval.

The researcher received Institutional Review Board approval before contacting participants. All middle space leaders were sent an informed consent letter that informed them of the purpose of the study and an assurance of anonymity. The researcher considered the time commitment that would be necessary for the participants to complete the survey and advised the participants of the time commitment that would be required of them. The participants were informed that there were minimal risks involved in their participation and that they were free to

terminate their participation in the study at any time. The researcher also informed the participants that the only possible benefit for participation in the study would be the benefits that it might create for the education of administrators and job satisfaction strategies for middle space leaders in the future.

The researcher analyzed the data sets using the statistical software, Jamovi Version 2.3. The researcher ran a Pearson Correlation test to determine if there was a relationship between mindfulness and professional quality of life. The Professional Quality of Life Scale survey is divided into three constructs: compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The researcher created variables using the Professional Quality of life Scale and the survey items displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Variables

Survey Scale	Variables	Survey Items	Survey Statements
Professional Quality of Life	Compassion Fatigue	2_1	“I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I work with.”
		2_4	“I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the people I work with.”
		2_8	“As a result of my job, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.”
	Burnout	2_2,	“I feel trapped by my job as a middle space leader.”

		2_6	“I feel worn out because of my work as a middle space leader.”
		2_7	“I feel overwhelmed because my case load seems endless.”
	Compassion Satisfaction	2_3	“I like my work as a middle space leader.”
		2_5	“My work makes me feel satisfied.”
		2_9	“I am happy that I chose to do this work.”

The researcher also created a variable for mindfulness using the survey questions from the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Once the variables were created, the researcher ran a Pearson Correlation to determine if there was a relationship between the variables of mindfulness and compassion fatigue, mindfulness and burnout, and mindfulness and compassion satisfaction.

Reliability

Data for each scale and subscale were analyzed to determine the reliability of the instruments. The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) included 9 survey items broken into three variables. The compassion fatigue variable within the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) included 3 survey items. Table 4 indicates that an acceptable level of reliability for the compassion fatigue variables within the Professional Quality of Life Scale was reached with alpha = .731.

Table 4*Professional Quality of Life Scale/Compassion Fatigue Reliability*

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Scale	1.96	0.734	.731*** p < .001

The next step was to see if there was reliability of the burnout variable within the scale. The burnout variable within the Professional Quality of Life scale (ProQOL) included 3 survey items. Table 5 indicates that burnout variables within the Professional Quality of Life Scale reached a strong reliability with alpha equaling .829.

Table 5*Professional Quality of Life/Burnout Reliability*

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Scale	2.87	1.02	.829*** p < .001

The compassion satisfaction variable within the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) included 3 survey items. Table 6 indicates that an acceptable level of reliability was reached with alpha equaling .729 for the compassion satisfaction variables within the Professional Quality of Life Scale.

Table 6*Professional Quality of Life Scale/Compassion Satisfaction Reliability*

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Scale	4.15	0.696	0.729** p < .001

The Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) included 13 survey items. Table 7 indicates that there are strong levels of reliability for mindfulness with alpha equaling .899.

Table 7

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Reliability

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Scale	2.97	0.877	.899

Research Question Findings

The research question for this study was: To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

- a) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue?
- b) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Burnout?
- c) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction?

A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' professional quality of life. This five-point scale uses a score of one (1) indicating never, a score of two (2) indicating rarely, a score of three (3) indicating sometimes, a score of four (4) indicating often, and a score of five (5) indicating very often. Table 8 shows descriptive statistics indicating that the mean score for the respondents' professional quality of life is 3.00. Therefore, the average middle space leader who participated in this study sometimes experiences a positive sense of professional quality of life.

Table 8

ProQOL Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
103	3.00	0.484

Within the Professional Quality of Life Scale, there are subscales measuring the respondents' professional quality of life with a focus on compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. Table 9 shows descriptive statistics indicating that the mean score for the respondents' compassion fatigue is 1.96. Therefore, the average middle space leader who participated in this study is not or is rarely experiencing compassion fatigue.

Table 9

Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	1.96	0.734

Table 10 shows descriptive statistics indicating that the mean score for the respondents' burnout is 2.87. Therefore, the average middle space leader who participated in this study is rarely or is sometimes experiencing burnout.

Table 10

Professional Quality of Life/Burnout Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	2.87	1.02

Table 11 shows descriptive statistics indicating that the mean score for the respondents' compassion satisfaction is 4.15. Therefore, the average middle space leader who participated in this study is often experiencing compassion satisfaction.

Table 11

Professional Quality of Life Scale/Compassion Satisfaction Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	4.15	0.696

A 6-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondents' mindfulness practices. A score of 1 indicating almost never, 2 indicating very infrequently, 3 indicating somewhat infrequently, 4 indicating somewhat frequently, 5 indicating very frequently, and 6 indicating almost always; therefore, 1 is the lowest level of mindfulness and 6 is the highest level of mindfulness. Table 12 shows the descriptive statistics for the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale indicating that the mean score for the respondents' mindfulness practices equaled .97. Therefore, the average middle space leader who participated in this study very infrequently or somewhat frequently practices mindfulness.

Table 12

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) Descriptive Statistics

N	Mean	Standard Deviation
104	2.97	0.877

The researcher used guidance from an article written by Schober et al. (2018) while analyzing the data from the Pearson Correlation test. "Several approaches have been suggested to translate the correlation coefficient into descriptors like 'weak,' 'moderate,' or 'strong'

relationships” (p. 1765). When using guidance from the chart provided within the article, correlation coefficients between .00 and .10 indicate negligible coefficients, correlation coefficients between .10 and .39 indicate weak correlations, correlation coefficients between .40 and .69 indicate moderate correlation, correlation coefficients between .70 and .89 indicate strong correlations, and correlation coefficients between .90 and 1.00 indicate very strong correlations (Schober et al., 2018).

Research Sub Question A

Research sub question a asks the following: to what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue? Within the 9-item Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), three items measure the compassion fatigue of the respondents; therefore, a Pearson Correlation test was used to determine if there was a relationship between the three questions (2_1, 2_4, and 2_8) of the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the fifteen questions from the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Table 13 shows the results from the correlation test which indicates that there was a moderate relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue with a correlation coefficient of .508.

Table 13

MAAS/ProQOL: Compassion Fatigue Pearson Correlation

Mindfulness	Pearson’s r p-value	.508
Compassion Fatigue		

Research Sub Question B

Research sub question b asks the following: to what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Burnout?

Within the 9-item Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), three items measure the burnout of the respondents; therefore, a Pearson Correlation test was used to determine if there was a relationship between the three questions (2_2, 2_6, 2_7) of the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the fifteen questions from the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Table 14 shows the results from the correlation test, which indicate that there was a moderate relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Burnout with a correlation coefficient of .606.

Table 14

MAAS/ProQOL: Burnout Pearson Correlation

Mindfulness	Pearson's r p-value	.606
Burnout		

Research Sub Question C

Research sub question c asks the following: to what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction? Within the 9-item Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL), three items measure the compassion satisfaction of the respondents; therefore, a Pearson Correlation test was used to determine if there was a relationship between the three questions (2_3, 2_5, 2_9) of the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the fifteen questions from the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale. Table 15 shows the results from the correlation test, which indicates that there was a weak correlation between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and the Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction with a correlation coefficient of .306.

Table 15

MAAS/ProQOL: Compassion Satisfaction Pearson Correlation

Mindfulness	Pearson's r p-value	.306
Compassion Satisfaction		

Summary of Results

This chapter provided the findings from the survey that combined the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). The results were analyzed to determine if there was a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders, specifically focusing on compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The instruments used to measure the professional quality of life and mindfulness were reliable.

Respondents in this study reported on average to rarely experience compassion fatigue, rarely experience burnout, and frequently experience compassion satisfaction. The result was that the middle space leaders sometimes experienced professional quality of life. Furthermore, the middle space leaders who responded to the survey practiced mindfulness somewhat frequently. Based on the results from this study, there were moderate relationships between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders, specifically a moderate relationship between mindfulness and compassion fatigue of the middle space leader. There was also a moderate relationship between mindfulness and burnout of the middle space leader, and there was a weak relationship between mindfulness and compassion satisfaction of the middle space leader.

Chapter V: Discussion

This study sought to determine if there was a relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders in public K-12 school systems across the state of Alabama in 2022. The study explored the constructs of professional quality of life based on the Professional Quality of Life survey (ProQOL): compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will provide a guide for future research surrounding public school leaders and their professional quality of life or mindfulness-based interventions for public school leaders.

In this chapter, the researcher provided a summary of the overall research study and discussed the findings that were represented in Chapter Four. The researcher provided a summary of the study which included an overview of the problem statement and the purpose statement of the study. Next, the researcher discussed the research questions and the methodology of the study was reiterated to provide an overview of the data collection processes. Also, the findings and results from the data analysis were discussed throughout this chapter. The findings were connected to the literature review, as well, which helped in making connections to major findings related to the themes of stress, compassion fatigue, burnout, compassion satisfaction, and mindfulness. The significance of the study and results of the study were connected to the literature around the themes of this study. This chapter also provided implications for middle space leaders and implications for leadership preparedness programs to improve the quality of life of middle space leaders. Finally, the researcher provided implications for future research around the themes of mindfulness and the professional quality of life that can benefit the field of education leadership.

Summary of the Study

Stress has become a daily experience for a majority of educators. Middle space leaders are no exception to this experience. Middle space leaders are central office staff in public K-12 school systems. These leaders are program managers, content area directors, budget specialists, and others who administer or manage programs or services but are not in top cabinet positions, such as superintendents and board members (Burch et al., 2004, p. 10). Middle space leaders experience a great deal of stress while they collaborate and support diverse populations and multiple people in a single day. They provide professional development while implementing new initiatives that are passed down from higher leaders in the district, such as superintendents, assistant or deputy superintendents, or board members. “After superintendents and school boards establish new policies, mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide’ or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 10). Middle space leaders experience inconsistent schedules and responsibilities daily. They often must change directions with their plans to meet the individual needs of the educators they are serving. “A growing body of research highlights a range of tensions in middle leadership with regard to the inherent difficulties for the role holder in trying to fulfill varied and often conflicting demands” (Branson, 2016, p. 2). These unstable demands and the necessity to be ‘quick on their feet’ often leads to stress and burnout, which can result in a decrease in their professional quality of life, less efficiency in their roles and responsibilities, and the inability to improve the success of the students and teachers they serve.

When middle space leaders are stressed and overworked, they experience unstable feelings. These unstable feelings can lead to a decrease of job satisfaction and an increase of

compassion fatigue and burnout which, in turn, lead to stress and a decrease in health (Gilmore, 1997, p. 1). Stress also renders them less likely to lead with efficiency and unable to improve the success of the students and teachers they serve. When middle space leaders experience feelings of compassion fatigue and burnout, they tend to be less effective in their positions which has a snowball effect on other individuals in the school system. There is current literature regarding educators and stress, burnout, and mindfulness; however, there is little to no literature surrounding the professional quality of life of middle space leaders and how mindfulness can support their professional quality of life. The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. Specifically, this study used two surveys combined into one survey using the program Qualtrics. The two surveys utilized in this study were the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS). Data were analyzed to determine if there was a relationship between the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders and mindfulness.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)?
 - d) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Fatigue?
 - e) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Burnout?
 - f) To what extent is there a relationship between the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale and Professional Quality of Life/Compassion Satisfaction?

Methodology Review

A quantitative research design was used in this study to statistically determine if there was a relationship between the professional quality of life of middle space leaders and mindfulness. An introductory question was included in the survey to disqualify any participants who were not currently serving a K-12 public school system in Alabama as a middle space leader. Two reliable instruments were used to measure the professional quality of life (ProQOL) of middle space leaders and mindfulness (MAAS). Demographic questions were used to collect information about participant age, gender, race, years of experience, departments served, and role of middle space leadership.

The surveys were combined into one instrument using a software for collecting data through surveys, Qualtrics. The survey was emailed to 1,728 K-12 public school middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. The researcher gathered email addresses for the middle space leaders by visiting each school system's website and creating a spreadsheet with all publicly listed email addresses organized by school systems. There are 138 public school systems in Alabama. The survey was sent to 100 public school systems in Alabama because 38 of these systems did not have publicly listed contact information on their school systems' websites. The researcher, therefore, did not send the survey to those school systems. Once the researcher sent the survey emails out, several emails were returned as undelivered and corrections to email addresses were made, when possible, but many of the undelivered responses were due to the middle space leader no longer being employed by the system. The response rate was also negatively impacted by some districts having protocols in place requiring outside individuals conducting surveys to request approval through a central office administrator. The researcher did

submit requests through the districts requesting this process, however, only one district responded with the approval.

Major Findings

The researcher analyzed the data sets using the statistical software, Jamovi Version 2.3, and the analysis of the data revealed clearly how middle space leaders experience compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction while being mindful. The findings showed how often middle space leaders experience compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The findings also showed how often middle space leaders experience mindfulness. The results of this study showed a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders serving public school systems in the state of Alabama. There was a focus on each subset of the professional quality of life of middle space leaders. The results of this study indicated a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/compassion fatigue of middle space leaders. There was a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/burnout of middle space leaders. There was a weak relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life/compassion satisfaction of middle space leaders. The study also indicated the frequency or infrequency middle space leaders in Alabama were experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction and the frequency or infrequency the participants were experiencing a state of mindfulness.

Compassion Fatigue

All middle space leaders who participated in this study were serving a public school system in the state of Alabama. Based on the results of this study, the average middle space leader who participated in this study was not or was rarely experiencing compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue is when an individual experiences emotional, physical, and social side effects from helping others (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). Middle space leaders collaborate and interact with many different people daily. During these interactions, middle space leaders are vicariously experiencing others' trauma through conversations or support. Compassion fatigue can result in a decline in the middle space leader's emotional health with symptoms of "exhaustion, frustration, anger and depression typical of burnout" (Stamm, 2010, p. 12). The results of the average middle space leader in the state of Alabama not experiencing or rarely experiencing compassion fatigue is a good sign for the success of education in the state of Alabama. The results also indicated a moderate relationship between mindfulness and compassion fatigue, which indicates that when middle space leaders practice mindfulness, they tend to experience less compassion fatigue.

Burnout

Because of the abundance of barriers faced daily by middle space leaders, they are at an increased likelihood of professional burnout. "Burnout is one of several factors that contribute to principal turnover which often destabilizes a school community" (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). Burnout, therefore, is the feeling of mental and emotional exhaustion due to the demands of the profession. These feelings make middle space leaders lack the motivation needed to continue supporting the students, teachers, and leaders within the districts they serve due to overwhelming emotional and social fatigue (Schwab et al., 1986, p. 14). Based on the results of this study, the average middle space leader participant is rarely or sometimes experiencing burnout; therefore, Alabama middle space leader responses to the survey indicated that they were rarely or sometimes experiencing feelings of burnout at the time of the survey. However, the results indicating a moderate relationship between mindfulness and burnout indicated that when the

middle space leaders practiced mindfulness, they tended to experience less burnout. Based on the literature presented in Chapter Two of this study, if these feelings of burnout are not addressed using some form of mindfulness-based intervention, the retention of middle space leaders who are experiencing feelings of burnout may be impacted.

Compassion Satisfaction

Middle space leaders interact with educators, leaders, parents, community members, and students daily. Their positions require them to offer support and advice focused around improving student success, however, this includes being exposed to traumatic materials or events indirectly through the individuals with whom they are working, which can lead to secondary trauma (Namminga, C. 2021). When middle space leaders are exposed to secondary trauma, they either experience compassion fatigue or compassion satisfaction. Compassion satisfaction is often a result of self-efficacy, empathy, and intervention programs. Individuals who experience compassion satisfaction tend to be more “motivated by a sense of satisfaction derived from helping others” (Bride et al., 2007, p. 155). “Researchers in the mental health field have found evidence that professionals with higher levels of compassion satisfaction also have increased experience, specialized training, and positive coping and career-sustaining behaviors” (DeMatthews et al., 2021, p. 4). Based on the results of this study, the average middle space leader participant often experienced compassion satisfaction; therefore, the middle space leaders in Alabama were indicating that they have self-efficacy, empathy, and/or participate in some form of intervention program that has supported their compassion satisfaction. However, the results of the study also indicated that the middle space leaders rarely or infrequently reached a state of mindfulness. This indicates that the middle space leaders were not utilizing or rarely utilized mindfulness-based intervention.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness refers to the capability of being aware of the present moment without judgment or striving; it means paying attention to purpose (Wells, 2013). Mindfulness has been used to improve anxiety, depression, and stress resulting in improving emotional and mental health. Mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques help by training the individual's attention “through straight forward, secular, meditation techniques” (Gold et al., 2010, p. 184). This strategy is meant to help improve the way individuals are impacted by stressful thoughts and events by decreasing the way they react to emotional and stressful experiences. “Mindfulness training leads to a fundamental change in relationship to experience (reperceiving), which leads to changes in self-regulation, values clarification, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, and exposure” (Carmody, 2009, p. 1). Based on the results of this study, the average middle space leader who participated in this study very infrequently or somewhat frequently practiced mindfulness.

Relationship Between Mindfulness and Professional Quality of Life

After reviewing the connections between the professional quality of life and mindfulness-based intervention programs, the literature supports the implementation of mindfulness practices as stress reduction and improvement in mental and psychological problems (Gold et al., 2010, p. 184). Mindfulness refers to the individual reaching a state of being aware in the present moment without judgment or trying to determine a solution; it means paying attention to purpose (Wells, 2013). Individuals who practice mindfulness tend to experience a reduced reaction towards stressors by being aware of how the body is reacting before the side effects happen through visualizing and what is causing their reaction. “Mindfulness meditation includes seeing life and reality exactly as they are, becoming aware of thoughts and feelings and noting them as such”

(Wells, 2013, p. 340). Mindfulness does not remove stressors from an individual's life. However, the literature in Chapter Two of this study supports the use of mindfulness-based interventions as a way to reduce the risk of compassion fatigue and burnout by improving the way an individual reacts to stressors they are experiencing. Based on the results of this study, there is a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders. However, the results indicate that the middle space leaders who participated in this study were very infrequently or somewhat frequently practicing mindfulness.

Significance of the Study

There is much research on the stress of educators and research on mindfulness practices to reduce stress. However, there is scarce research on the professional quality of life of middle space leaders or how mindfulness is related to the professional quality of life of middle space leaders. This study provided a look at how middle space leaders in the state of Alabama are experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction and provided a view into the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders in public school systems in the state of Alabama. The literature review of this study indicated the abundance of data demonstrating that educators are stressed and overworked. They are balancing many responsibilities daily and face unannounced challenges often. Middle space leaders are supporting these educators which can lead to experiences of secondary trauma causing middle space leaders to experience feelings of burnout. This study provided information to guide further research into strategies for retaining middle space leaders within public school systems in the state of Alabama.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. The study was conducted as an anonymous qualitative study which limited the researcher's knowledge of interventions, such as mindfulness,

being implemented within the school systems. Also, since the study was anonymous, the researcher was unable to identify any barriers or biases around the questions in the surveys focused on mindfulness or stress. The researcher knew that at least one school system that received the request to participate in the study had implemented a mindfulness based professional development within the district; however, the researcher was purposely unable to decipher responses based on the systems who have participated in a mindfulness-based professional development to establish and guarantee participant anonymity.

The survey instruments utilized within the study, the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) may have had language or examples of experiences that may have been interpreted differently by the participants. Therefore, the responses may have been skewed due to a lack of understanding of the meanings behind the questions or the experiences being interpreted differently based on each middle space leaders' backgrounds and experiences. Lastly, the timing of the study may have impacted the responses to the study. The survey was sent out at the beginning of a school year which tends to be a busy time for middle space leaders. The researcher resent the survey four times to reach the intended response rate. Therefore, the researcher cannot guarantee that the responses to the survey were completed with a true representation of their experiences due to the hectic business of the beginning of the school year. This would differ based on the size and struggles of each school system who participated in the study.

Implications for Practice

Implications for Middle Space Leaders

Effective middle space leaders are often the bridge between schools and the higher leaders in the school system. Research by Burch and Spillane (2004) suggests that “mid-level

managers have significant impacts on how district reform policies are understood and acted on by school leaders” (p. 10). They often are the ‘change agents’ in their school systems by designing and implementing the initiatives needed. “Mid-level staff have the job of translating big ideas like ‘improving literacy district-wide’ or ‘closing the achievement gap’ into strategies, guidelines, and procedures that are handed down to schools” (Burch & Spillane, 2004, p. 4). The high-demand and challenging expectations of middle space leaders can result in an increase of unstable feelings within their positions. These unstable feelings can lead to stress and a decrease in health, which can result in less likelihood of leading efficiently and the inability to improve the success of the students and teachers they serve. This can lead to a decrease in the middle space leader’s professional quality of life.

While completing the study, middle space leaders in Alabama scored themselves generously in each of the professional quality of life variables (compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction) for an overall indication of a positive professional quality of life. In addition to rating themselves highly in the areas of their professional quality of life, they rated themselves with very infrequently or somewhat frequently being in a state of mindfulness. Therefore, the middle space leaders serving public school systems in the state of Alabama are responding with minimal experiences of compassion fatigue or burnout and some experiences of compassion satisfaction. Middle space leaders in the state of Alabama are indicating little to some experiences of mindfulness. These results are optimistic regarding the mental and emotional state of the middle space leaders serving public school systems in the state of Alabama. However, it leads the researcher to wonder if the professional quality of life would be even more positive if the middle space leaders were more aware of mindfulness practices or were practicing mindfulness at a higher rate. Middle space leaders who are experiencing a positive

professional quality of life and reaching a state of mindfulness could lead to a positive impact on schools, the culture of a school system, the quality of professional developments provided, effective collaboration within the district, and teacher and student achievement due to the middle space leaders' support being more effective. Therefore, providing opportunities for middle space leaders to learn more about mindfulness and how to reach a state of mindfulness could be beneficial to the middle space leader and the educators and students within the districts they serve.

Implications for Leadership Preparedness Programs/Professional Developments

The results of this study indicated that there was a moderate relationship between mindfulness and the professional quality of life of middle space leaders in Alabama. The literature supports the idea that the more mindful a middle space leader is, the better their professional quality of life would be. However, the data from this study also indicated that the middle space leaders who participated in this study were experiencing a positive professional quality of life but had little to no experiences with mindfulness. The literature strongly supports the benefits of mindfulness for stressful experiences. Mindfulness practice tends to have a calming effect and “has been correlated with numerous health benefits” (Wells, 2013, p. 340). Therefore, when middle space leaders are practicing mindfulness consistently and appropriately, they are reacting to stress in a healthier way.

Middle space leaders are formed and developed in leadership development programs. Leadership development programs help lay the foundation for educational leaders by providing them knowledge and guidance for becoming a leader within education. This includes curriculum focus areas like ethics, law, systems thinking, finance and budgeting, and other areas of focus of which educational leaders need to be able to be knowledgeable when leading a school,

department, or school system. For those focus areas to be implemented efficiently, however, educational leaders must be able to manage stress and reduce the chances of burnout. “Education involves an excessive emotional demand in the form of assistance, converting it in a risk factor for development of burnout” (Perez-Chacon et al., 2021, p. 2). Leadership development programs could benefit from adding a focus on stress management and mindfulness into their course work. This would support the development of leaders and provide them the knowledge of coping with stress and the overwhelming aspects of their roles as leaders. Mindfulness trainings integrated into the coursework for leadership preparedness programs can help provide support for the duration of their graduates’ leadership careers. Mindfulness has been used to improve anxiety, depression, and stress resulting in improving emotional and mental health. “Mindfulness training leads to a fundamental change in relationship to experience (reperceiving), which leads to changes in self-regulation, values clarification, cognitive and behavioral flexibility, and exposure” (Carmody, 2009, p. 1). This study supports the implementation of mindfulness practices into leadership preparedness programs to provide their graduates a foundation for a positive professional quality of life.

Middle space leaders could benefit from professional developments and resources to support their knowledge around mindfulness. This study indicated that very few middle space leaders are reaching a state of mindfulness, which can impact many avenues of their positions. If the middle space leaders who participated in this study had been more informed of mindfulness and had stronger mindfulness results, the professional quality of life results would have been impacted positively. Implementing mindfulness professional developments within the school systems could benefit the overall professional quality of life throughout the district with the middle space leaders, school leaders, teachers, and students.

Using a quantitative approach, this study raised awareness around the stress and professional quality of life of middle space leaders in public K-12 school systems. This study added to the existing literature of mindfulness practices and how mindfulness may contribute to the professional quality of life of middle space leaders serving public K-12 school systems. Ultimately, the literature around the topic of stress and burnout of middle space leaders and the result of this study implied that an improvement of mindfulness awareness in school systems is an important factor to the success of many individuals within a school system including the retention of leaders and achievement within the district.

Implications for Future Research

After reviewing the results of this study and the literature surrounding stress, burnout, and mindfulness practices, the following recommendations for future research on the topic of professional quality of life and mindfulness should be considered:

1. Replicate this study but with a different methodological approach. Instead of using the Professional Quality of Life survey (ProQOL) and the Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), a researcher could approach the study with a qualitative approach with interviews for more in-depth information. This would allow the researcher to group common terms used during the participants responses into variables with common language for compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction.
2. Conduct a study that compares the professional quality of life of middle space leaders from districts that have participated in mindfulness-based professional development and districts that have not participated in a mindfulness-based professional development. Is there a difference between the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders based on their exposure and knowledge of mindfulness?

3. Conduct a longitudinal study to track the professional quality of life of middle space leaders over time to determine how their professional quality of life changes with an intervention program of mindfulness being implemented throughout the longitudinal study. Based on the literature, it could be hypothesized that the professional quality of life would improve over time if an intervention of mindfulness was being implemented consistently.
4. Conduct a mixed methods approach to this study utilizing the same surveys as this study (ProQOL and MAAS) but add follow-up interview questions to clarify responses to the surveys. If there are confusions or misconceptions to statements or questions in the surveys, they would be identified throughout the follow-up interviews. Trends would also be identified through the interviews.
5. Replicate this study but add a demographic question that sorts the school systems by size, demographics, and location of the school system in the state. Would the size of the school system impact the professional quality of life of the middle space leaders? Would the demographics or location of the school system (urban, rural, suburban) impact the compassion fatigue or burnout of the middle space leader?
6. Replicate this study with other education professionals. This study assessed the relationship between the professional quality of life and mindfulness of middle space leaders in K-12 public school systems in Alabama. Other educators, such as principals, teachers, or classified staff may experience a different professional quality of life due to their unique roles and the stressors of their responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study added to the existing literature on the topic of mindfulness and educators' stress, burnout, and professional quality of life with a focus on compassion fatigue, burnout, and compassion satisfaction. The results indicate a moderate relationship between the mindfulness and professional quality of life of middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. Alabama middle space leaders who responded to the surveys in this study responded as sometimes having a positive professional quality of life. The average middle space leader who participated in this study is not or is rarely experiencing compassion fatigue, is rarely or is sometimes experiencing burnout, and is often experiencing compassion satisfaction. The average middle space leader who participated in this study very infrequently or somewhat frequently practiced mindfulness. Therefore, even though middle space leaders are rarely experiencing a state of mindfulness, they are sometimes having a positive professional quality of life.

References

- Abenavoli, R. M., Jennings, P. A., Greenberg, M. T., Harris, A. R., & Katz, D. A. (2013). The protective effects of mindfulness against burnout among educators. *Psychology of Education Review*, 37(2), 57-69.
- Aziri, B. (2011). Job satisfaction: A literature review. *Management Research & Practice*, 3(4).
- Barnett, J. E., & Cooper, N. (2009). Creating a culture of self-care.
- Berkovich, I., & Eyal, O. (2015). Educational leaders and emotions: An international review of empirical evidence 1992–2012. *Review of Educational Research*, 85(1), 129-167.
- Birnie, K., Speca, M., & Carlson, L. E. (2010). Exploring self-compassion and empathy in the context of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). *Stress and Health*, 26(5), 359-371.
- Bishop, S. R. (2002). What do we really know about mindfulness-based stress reduction?. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 64(1), 71-83.
- Borders, A., Earleywine, M., & Jajodia, A. (2010). Could mindfulness decrease anger, hostility, and aggression by decreasing rumination?. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression*, 36(1), 28-44.
- Branson, C. M., Franken, M., & Penney, D. (2016). Middle leadership in higher education: A relational analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 44(1), 128-145.
- Bride, B. E., Radey, M., & Figley, C. R. (2007). Measuring compassion fatigue. *Clinical social work journal*, 35(3), 155-163.

- Brown, K. W., & Ryan, R. M. (2003). The benefits of being present: mindfulness and its role in psychological well-being. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 84(4), 822.
- Brown, V., Olson, K., & Brady, R. (2015). *The mindful school leader: Practices to transform your leadership and school*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.
- Burch, P., & Spillane, J. (2004). Leading from the middle: Mid-level district staff and instructional improvement. *Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform*.
- Carmody, J., Baer, R. A., Lykins, E., & Olendzki, N. (2009). An empirical study of the mechanisms of mindfulness in a mindfulness-based stress reduction program. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 65(6), 613-626.
- Ciarrochi, J., & Godsell, C. (2005). Mindfulness-based emotional intelligence: A theory and review of the literature. *Emotional intelligence: An international handbook*, 69-90.
- Clegg, S., & McAuley, J. (2005). Conceptualising middle management in higher education: A multifaceted discourse. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 27(1), 19-34.
- DeMatthews, D. E., Reyes, P., Carrola, P., Edwards, W., & James, L. (2021). Novice Principal Burnout: Exploring Secondary Trauma, Working Conditions, and Coping Strategies in an Urban District. Publication. *Texas Education Research Center*.
- Dobkin, P. L. (2008). Mindfulness-based stress reduction: what processes are at work?. *Complementary therapies in clinical practice*, 14(1), 8-16.
- Fowler, M. (2015). Dealing with compassion fatigue. *The Education Digest*, 81(3), 30.

- Galiana, L., Oliver, A., Arena, F., De Simone, G., Tomás, J. M., Vidal-Blanco, G., ... & Sansó, N. (2020). Development and validation of the Short Professional Quality of Life Scale based on versions IV and V of the Professional Quality of Life Scale. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 18(1), 1-12.
- Gilmore, T. N. (1997). Leaders as middles. *Center for Applied Research, Philadelphia*.
- Gold, E., Smith, A., Hopper, I., Herne, D., Tansey, G., & Hulland, C. (2010). Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) for primary school teachers. *Journal of child and family studies*, 19(2), 184-189.
- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2019). Leading from the middle: its nature, origins and importance. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*.
- Hawk, N., & Martin, B. (2011). Understanding and reducing stress in the superintendency. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(3), 364-390.
- Kasl, S. V. (1984). Stress and health. *Annual review of public health*, 5(1), 319-341.
- Kitchel, T., Smith, A. R., Henry, A. L., Robinson, J. S., Lawver, R. G., Park, T. D., & Schell, A. (2012). Teacher job satisfaction and burnout viewed through social comparisons. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 53(1), 31-44.
- MacDonald, W. (2003). The impact of job demands and workload on stress and fatigue. *Australian Psychologist*, 38(2), 102-117.
- Mahfouz, J., & Richardson, J. W. (2021). At the Crossroads: Wellbeing and Principals Preparation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 16(4), 360–384.

- McCleskey, J. (2014). Emotional intelligence and leadership. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*.
- Moshel, S., & Berkovich, I. (2020). Navigating ambiguity: Early childhood leaders' sense-making of their identity in a new mid-level role. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 48(3), 514-531.
- Namminga, C. (2021). Secondary Trauma: How Does It Impact Educators.
- Nelson, J. R., Hall, B. S., Anderson, J. L., Birtles, C., & Hemming, L. (2018). Self-compassion as self-care: A simple and effective tool for counselor educators and counseling students. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 13(1), 121-133.
- Patterson, J. L., Goens, G. A., & Reed, D. E. (2009). Resilient Leadership for Turbulent Times.
- Perdrizet, G. A. (1997). Hans Selye and beyond: responses to stress. *Cell stress & chaperones*, 2(4), 214.
- Pérez-Chacón, M., Chacón, A., Borda-Mas, M., & Avargues-Navarro, M. L. (2021). Sensory processing sensitivity and compassion satisfaction as risk/protective factors from burnout and compassion fatigue in healthcare and education professionals. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), 611.
- Perrachione, B. A., Rosser, V. J., & Petersen, G. J. (2008). Why Do They Stay? Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Job Satisfaction and Retention. *Professional Educator*, 32(2), n2.
- Quick, J. C., & Henderson, D. F. (2016). Occupational stress: Preventing suffering, enhancing wellbeing. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 13(5), 459.

- Rosch, P. J. (2015). Hans Selye: Birth of Stress. *The American Institute of Stress*, 1-4.
- Rosekind, M. R. (2005). Managing work schedules: an alertness and safety perspective. *Principles and practice of sleep medicine*, 680-690.
- Schober, P., Boer, C., & Schwarte, L. A. (2018). Correlation coefficients: appropriate use and interpretation. *Anesthesia & Analgesia*, 126(5), 1763-1768.
- Schonfeld, I. S., Bianchi, R., & Luehring-Jones, P. (2017). Consequences of job stress for the mental health of teachers. In *Educator stress* (pp. 55-75). Springer, Cham.
- Schwab, R. L., Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1986). Educator burnout: Sources and consequences. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 10(3), 14-30.
- Selye, H. (1985). The nature of stress. *Basal facts*, 7(1), 3-11.
- Selye, H. (1976). Forty years of stress research: principal remaining problems and misconceptions. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 115(1), 53.
- Shernoff, E. S., Mehta, T. G., Atkins, M. S., Torf, R., & Spencer, J. (2011). A qualitative study of the sources and impact of stress among urban teachers. *School mental health*, 3(2), 59-69.
- Sprang, G., Clark, J. J., & Whitt-Woosley, A. (2007). Compassion fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout: Factors impacting a professional's quality of life. *Journal of loss and trauma*, 12(3), 259-280.
- Stamm, B. H. (2005). The ProQOL manual. Retrieved July, 16, 2007.
- Stamm, B. (2010). The concise manual for the professional quality of life scale.

Steyn, G. M., & D. Kamper, G. (2006). Understanding occupational stress among educators: an overview. *Africa Education Review*, 3(1-2), 113-133.

The professional quality of life scale – 5 (ProQOL). NovoPsych. (2021, December 17).

Retrieved February 27, 2022, from <https://novopsych.com.au/assessments/clinician-self-assessment/the-professional-quality-of-life-scale-5-proqol/>

Van Dam, N. T., Earleywine, M., & Borders, A. (2010). Measuring mindfulness? An item response theory analysis of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale. *Personality and individual differences*, 49(7), 805-810.

Wells, C. M. (2013). Principals responding to constant pressure: Finding a source of stress management. *NASSP Bulletin*, 97(4), 335-349.

Zamarro, G., Camp, A., Fuchsman, D., & McGee, J. B. (2022, March 9). *How the pandemic has changed teachers' commitment to remaining in the classroom*. Brookings. Retrieved June 3, 2022, from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/09/08/how-the-pandemic-has-changed-teachers-commitment-to-remaining-in-the-classroom/>

Appendix A

Revised 06/09/2022

1

AUBURN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM (HRPP)

REQUEST for MODIFICATION

For Information or help completing this form, contact: **The Office of Research Compliance (ORC)**
 Phone: 334-844-5966 E-Mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu

- Federal regulations require IRB approval before implementing proposed changes.
- Change means any change, in content or form, to the protocol, consent form, or any supportive materials (such as the investigator's Brochure, questionnaires, surveys, advertisements, etc.). See Item 4 for more examples.

1. Today's Date	7/15/2022
------------------------	-----------

2. Principal Investigator (PI) Name: Kelsey Deason			
PI's Title:	Graduate Student	Faculty PI (if PI is a student):	Dr. Ellen (Reames) Hahn
Department:	EFLT	Department:	EFLT
Phone:	205-706-1859	Phone:	706-573-7563
AU E-Mail:	Kad0073@auburn.edu	AU E-Mail:	reamseh@auburn.edu
Contact person who should receive copies of IRB correspondence (Optional):	Click or tap here to enter text.	Department Head Name:	James Satterfield
Phone:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Phone:	334-844-3060
AU E-Mail:	Click or tap here to enter text.	AU E-Mail:	Jws0089@auburn.edu

3. AU IRB Protocol Identification	
3.a. Protocol Number: 22-295	
3.b. Protocol Title: Middle Space Leader: Professional Quality of Life	
3. c. Current Status of Protocol – For active studies, check ONE box at left; provide numbers and dates where applicable	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study has not yet begun; no data has been entered or collected	
<input type="checkbox"/> In progress If YES, number of data/participants entered: <small>Click or tap here to enter text.</small>	Current Approval Dates
<input type="checkbox"/> Is this modification request being made in conjunction with/as a result of protocol renewal? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	From: <small>Click or tap to enter a date.</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> Adverse events since last review If YES, describe: <small>Click or tap here to enter text.</small>	To: <small>Click or tap to enter a date.</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> Data analysis only	
<input type="checkbox"/> Funding Agency and Grant Number: <small>Click or tap here to enter text.</small>	AU Funding Information: <small>Click or tap here to enter text.</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> List any other institutions and/ or AU approved studies associated with this project: <small>Click or tap here to enter text.</small>	

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from
07/18/2022 to
 Protocol # 22-295 EX 2206

4. Types of Change Mark all that apply, and describe the changes in item 5	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in Key Personnel List the name(s) of personnel being added to or removed from the study and attach a copy of the CITI documentation for personnel being added to the study.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Additional Sites or Change in Sites, including AU classrooms, etc. Attach permission forms for new sites.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in methods for data storage/ protection or location of data/ consent documents
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in project purpose or project questions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in population or recruitment Attach new or revised recruitment materials as needed; both highlighted version & clean copy for IRB approval stamp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Change in study procedure(s) Attach new or revised consent documents as needed; both highlighted revised copy & clean copy for IRB approval stamp
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Change in data collection instruments/forms (surveys, data collection forms) Attach new forms as needed; both highlighted version & clean copy for IRB approval stamp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (BUAs, DUAs, etc.) Indicate the type of change in the space below, and provide details in the Item 5.c. or 5.d. as applicable. Include a copy of all affected documents, with revisions highlighted as applicable. Click or tap here to enter text.

5. Description and Rationale	
5.a. For each item marked in Question #4 describe the requested change(s) to your research protocol, and the rationale for each.	
Demographic questions were added to the survey to provide additional information about the sample. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What department do you currently serve in as a middle space leader? - Which of the following describes your position best? - How would you best describe yourself? 	
5.b. Briefly list (numbered or bulleted) the activities that have occurred up to this point, particularly those that involved participants.	
No activities have occurred yet.	
5.c. Does the requested change affect participants, such as procedures, risks, costs, benefits, etc.	
No	
5.d. Attach a copy of all "IRB stamped" documents currently used. (Information letters, consent forms, flyers, etc.)	
Click or tap here to enter text.	
5.e. List all revised documents and attach two copies of the revised documents – one copy which highlights the revisions and one clean copy of the revised documents for the IRB approval stamp.	
Survey	

6. Signatures
Principal Investigator: <u> <i>Kelsey Deason</i> </u>
Faculty Advisor PI, if applicable: <u> <i>Ellen Pearson Hahn</i> </u>

Version Date: 7/15/2022

6.27.22

TO: IRBsubmit@auburn.edu

FROM: Kelsey Deason

SUBJECT: Deason Protocol Review Request #22-295, "Middle Space Leader: Professional Quality of Life"

Below is a list of changes made to the above-named protocol, based on IRB's requested revisions.

Below is a list of changes made to the above-named protocol, based on IRB's request revisions.

1. The revised Information Letter continues to have a section for study investigators to sign. Because the consent process occurs largely online, either add the names of investigators to the section or delete the signature section entirely. With the revised submission, include a copy of all study materials included with the last submission.

Signature lines were deleted entirely.

AUBURN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM (HRPP)

EXEMPT REVIEW APPLICATIONFor assistance, contact: **The Office of Research Compliance (ORC)**Phone: **334-844-5966** E-Mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu Web Address: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs>**Submit completed form and supporting materials as one PDF through the [IRB Submission Page](#)***Hand written forms are not accepted. Where links are found hold down the control button (Ctrl) then click the link...***1. Project Identification**Today's Date: **June 15, 2022**Anticipated start date of the project: **July 30, 2022** Anticipated duration of project: *Choose an item.***a. Project Title: Middle Space Leaders: Professional Quality of Life****b. Principal Investigator (PI): Kelsey Deason**

Degree(s): PhD Candidate

Rank/Title: Graduate Student

Department/School: EFLT

Role/responsibilities in this project: **Principal researcher and Auburn graduate student responsible for the study; Obtain informed consent; analyze survey data.**Preferred Phone Number: **205-706-1859**AU Email: kad0073@auburn.edu**Faculty Advisor Principal Investigator (if applicable): Dr. Ellen (Reames) Hahn**

Rank/Title: Professor

Department/School: EFLT

Role/responsibilities in this project: **Major Professor/Doctoral Chair- Dissertation supervisor and advisor. Will provide feedback on dissertation with required revisions to be made.**Preferred Phone Number: **706-573-7563**AU Email: reamseh@auburn.edu**Department Head: James Satterfield**

Department/School: EFLT

Preferred Phone Number: **334-844-3060**AU Email: jws0089@auburn.eduRole/responsibilities in this project: *Click or tap here to enter text.***c. Project Key Personnel** – Identify all key personnel who will be involved with the conduct of the research and describe their role in the project. Role may include design, recruitment, consent process, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. ([To determine key personnel, see decision tree](#)). *Exempt determinations are made by individual institutions; reliance on other institutions for exempt determination is not feasible. Non-AU personnel conducting exempt research activities must obtain approval from the IRB at their home institution.*Key personnel are required to maintain human subjects training through [CITI](#). Only for EXEMPT level research is documentation of completed CITI training NO LONGER REQUIRED to be included in the submission packet.NOTE however, **the IRB will perform random audits of CITI training records to confirm** reported training courses and expiration dates. Course title and expiration dates are shown on training certificates.**Name: Kelsey Deason**

Degree(s): PhD Candidate

Rank/Title: Graduate Student

Department/School: EFLT

Role/responsibilities in this project: **Principal researcher and Auburn graduate student responsible for the study; Obtain informed consent; analyze survey data.**- AU affiliated? Yes No If no, name of home institution: *Click or tap here to enter text.*- Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? *Click or tap here to enter text.*- Do you have any known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or other interests that could have influence or appear to have influence on the work conducted in this project? Yes No- If yes, briefly describe the potential or real conflict of interest: *Click or tap here to enter text.*- Completed required CITI training? Yes No If NO, complete the appropriate [CITI basic course](#) and update the revised Exempt Application form.

- If YES, choose course(s) the researcher has completed: Human Sciences Basic Course 5/30/2024

Refresher Course 5/30/2024

Name: Dr. Ellen (Reames) Hahn **Degree(s):** Ed.D
Rank/Title: Professor **Department/School:** EFLT
Role/responsibilities in this project: Major Professor/Doctoral Chair- Dissertation supervisor and advisor. Will provide feedback on dissertation with required revisions to be made.
 - AU affiliated? Yes No If no, name of home institution: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 - Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel?
 - Do you have any known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or other interests that could have influence or appear to have influence on the work conducted in this project? Yes No
 - If yes, briefly describe the potential or real conflict of interest:
 - Completed required CITI training? Yes No If NO, complete the appropriate [CITI basic course](#) and update the revised EXEMPT application form.
 - If YES, choose course(s) the researcher has completed: Human Sciences Basic Course 1/29/2025
 Refresher Course 1/29/2025

Name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) **Degree(s):** [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
Rank/Title: [Choose Rank/Title](#) **Department/School:** [Choose Department/School](#)
Role/responsibilities in this project: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 - AU affiliated? Yes No If no, name of home institution: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 - Plan for IRB approval for non-AU affiliated personnel? [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 - Do you have any known competing financial interests, personal relationships, or other interests that could have influence or appear to have influence on the work conducted in this project? Yes No
 - If yes, briefly describe the potential or real conflict of interest: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 - Completed required CITI training? Yes No If NO, complete the appropriate [CITI basic course](#) and update the revised EXEMPT application form.
 - If YES, choose course(s) the researcher has completed: [Choose a course](#) [Expiration Date](#)
[Choose a course](#) [Expiration Date](#)

- d. **Funding Source** – Is this project funded by the investigator(s)? Yes No
 Is this project funded by AU? Yes No If YES, identify source [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
 Is this project funded by an external sponsor? Yes No If YES, provide name of sponsor, type of sponsor (governmental, non-profit, corporate, other), and an identification number for the award.
Name: [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) **Type:** [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) **Grant #:** [Click or tap here to enter text.](#)
- e. List other AU IRB-approved research projects and/or IRB approvals from other institutions that are associated with this project. Describe the association between this project and the listed project(s):
[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

2. Project Summary

a. Does the study **TARGET** any special populations? Answer YES or NO to all.

Minors (under 18 years of age; if minor participants, at least 2 adults must be present during all research procedures that include the minors)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Auburn University Students	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pregnant women, fetuses, or any products of conception	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Prisoners or wards (unless incidental, not allowed for Exempt research)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Temporarily or permanently impaired	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

b. Does the research pose more than minimal risk to participants?Yes No

If YES, to question 2.b, then the research activity is NOT eligible for EXEMPT review. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research is not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or test. 42 CFR 46.102(i)

c. Does the study involve any of the following? If YES to any of the questions in item 2.c, then the research activity is NOT eligible for EXEMPT review.

Procedures subject to FDA regulations (drugs, devices, etc.)

Yes No

Use of school records of identifiable students or information from instructors about specific students.

Yes No

Protected health or medical information when there is a direct or indirect link which could identify the participant.

Yes No

Collection of sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or alcohol use.

Yes No **d. Does the study include deception? Requires limited review by the IRB***Yes No **3. MARK the category or categories below that describe the proposed research. Note the IRB Reviewer will make the final determination of the eligible category or categories.**

1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices. The research is not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn or assessment of educators providing instruction. 104(d)(1)
2. Research only includes interactions involving educational tests, surveys, interviews, public observation if at least ONE of the following criteria. (The research includes data collection only; may include visual or auditory recording; may NOT include intervention and only includes interactions). **Mark the applicable sub-category below (i, ii, or iii). 104(d)(2)**
- (i) Recorded information cannot readily identify the participant (directly or indirectly/ linked);
OR
- surveys and interviews: no children;
- educational tests or observation of public behavior: can only include children when investigators do not participate in activities being observed.
- (ii) Any disclosures of responses outside would not reasonably place participant at risk; **OR**
- (iii) Information is recorded with identifiers or code linked to identifiers and IRB conducts limited review; no children. **Requires limited review by the IRB.***
3. Research involving Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBi)** through verbal, written responses including data entry or audiovisual recording from adult subjects who prospectively agree and ONE of the following criteria is met. (This research does not include children and does not include medical interventions. Research cannot have deception unless the participant prospectively agrees that they will be unaware of or misled regarding the nature and purpose of the research) **Mark the applicable sub-category below (A, B, or C). 104(d)(3)(i)**
- (A) Recorded information cannot readily identify the subject (directly or indirectly/ linked); **OR**
- (B) Any disclosure of responses outside of the research would not reasonably place subject at risk;

- (C) Information is recorded with identifies and cannot have deception unless participants prospectively agree. **Requires limited review by the IRB.***
- 4. Secondary research for which consent is not required: use of identifiable information or identifiable bio-specimen that have been or will be collected for some other 'primary' or 'initial' activity, if one of the following criteria is met. Allows retrospective and prospective secondary use. **Mark the applicable sub-category below (i, ii, iii, or iv).** 104 (d)(4)
 - (i) Bio-specimens or information are publicly available;
 - (ii) Information recorded so subject cannot readily be identified, directly or indirectly/linked investigator does not contact subjects and will not re-identify the subjects; **OR**
 - (iii) Collection and analysis involving investigators use of identifiable health information when us is regulated by HIPAA "health care operations" or "research" or "public health activities and purposes" (does not include bio-specimens (only PHI and requires federal guidance on how to apply); **OR**
 - (iv) Research information collected by or on behalf of federal government using government generated or collected information obtained for non-research activities.
- 5. Research and demonstration projects which are supported by a federal agency/department AND designed to study and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or service under those programs. (must be posted on a federal web site). 104.5(d)(5) (must be posted on a federal web site)
- 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, (i) if wholesome foods without additives and consumed or (ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The research does not involve prisoners as participants. 104(d)(6)

**Limited IRB review – the IRB Chair or designated IRB reviewer reviews the protocol to ensure adequate provisions are in place to protect privacy and confidentiality.*

***Category 3 – Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBI) must be brief in duration, painless/harmless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on participants, and it is unlikely participants will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing.*

**** Exemption categories 7 and 8 require broad consent. The AU IRB has determined the regulatory requirements for legally effective broad consent are not feasible within the current institutional infrastructure. EXEMPT categories 7 and 8 will not be implemented at this time.*

4. Describe the proposed research including who does what, when, where, how, and for how long, etc.

a. Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study is to explore the relationship between the Professional Quality of Life and Mindfulness of middle space leaders in school districts across Alabama. Specifically, the study will determine the

Revised 02/01/2022

professional quality of life of the middle space leaders, as measured by the Professional Quality of Life survey and how the dimensions of job satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout are related to mindfulness. The participant population is composed of public school middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. Middle space leaders are program managers, content area directors, specialists, and others who are serving school systems at the central offices across the state of Alabama. Superintendents and school level administrators will be excluded from this study. The researcher will send an email to middle space leaders across the state of Alabama containing the consent to participate letter, which outlines the procedures for inclusion in the survey as well as an information letter with a link to the survey. Email addresses were obtained by visiting school district websites. Publicly listed email addresses were used. The survey is anonymous as no personally identifiable information will be collected. Quantitative data will be collected via Qualtrics which is an electronic survey program. The expected time to complete this survey is approximately five minutes. The researcher will send the recruitment materials and analyze the resulting data using SPSS.

- b. Participant population, including the number of participants and the rationale for determining number of participants to recruit and enroll. Note if the study enrolls minor participants, describe the process to ensure more than 1 adult is present during all research procedures which include the minor.

The participant population is composed of public-school middle space leaders in the state of Alabama. Middle space leaders are program managers, content area directors, specialists, and others who are serving school systems at the central offices across the state of Alabama. Superintendents and school level administrators will be excluded from this study. The anticipated number of participants for this study is 150.

- c. Recruitment process. Address whether recruitment includes communications/interactions between study staff and potential participants either in person or online. *Submit a copy of all recruitment materials.*

The researcher will send an email to middle space leaders across the state of Alabama containing the Information Letter with a link to the survey, which outlines the procedures for inclusion in the survey. Email addresses were obtained by visiting school district websites. Publicly listed email addresses were used.

- d. Consent process including how information is presented to participants, etc.

Participants will be initially prompted by an email explain the study. The email will contain an Information Letter. The Information Letter will include an overview of the study, confidentiality, associated risks and discomforts, and an option to withdraw. The Information Letter will have the survey link attached.

- e. Research procedures and methodology

Quantitative data will be collected via Qualtrics which is an electronic survey program. The anticipated number of participants for this survey is 150. The study will look at a relationship between the professional quality of life of middle space leaders and mindfulness.

- f. Anticipated time per study exercise/activity and total time if participants complete all study activities. Participants will need approximately five minutes to complete the survey after reading the recruitment email and Information Letter.
- g. Location of the research activities.
The survey link will be located on an information letter that will be sent via email to middle space leaders across the state of Alabama. The survey is an anonymous online survey via Qualtrics.
- h. Costs to and compensation for participants? If participants will be compensated describe the amount, type, and process to distribute.
There is no anticipated cost or compensation for participants.
- i. Non-AU locations, site, institutions. *Submit a copy of agreements/IRB approvals.*
[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

- j. Additional relevant information.
[Click or tap here to enter text.](#)

5. Waivers

Check applicable waivers and describe how the project meets the criteria for the waiver.

- Waiver of Consent (Including existing de-identified data)
- Waiver of Documentation of Consent (Use of Information Letter, rather than consent form requiring signatures)
- Waiver of Parental Permission (in Alabama, 18 years-olds may be considered adults for research purposes)

<https://sites.auburn.edu/admin/orc/irb/IRB 1 Exempt and Expedited/11-113 MR 1104 Hinton Renewal 2021-1.pdf>

- a. Provide the rationale for the waiver request.

The information letter will be included in the email sent to invite participants to participate in the survey. The letter explains that participation in the survey is voluntary and that all responses are anonymous.

6. Describe the process to select participants/data/specimens. If applicable, include gender, race, and ethnicity of the participant population.

The survey will be distributed to all available email addresses of K-12 public school middle space leaders across the state of Alabama. No gender, race, or ethnicity will be targeted or excluded from the survey.

7. Risks and Benefits

- 7a. Risks - Describe why none of the research procedures would cause a participant either physical or psychological discomfort or be perceived as discomfort above and beyond what the person would experience in daily life (minimal risk).

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. The risks associated with participating in this study are the potential for psychological distress and discomfort associated with answering questions related to their professional quality of life, stress, and mindfulness. Participants can minimize these risks by choosing to stop at any point or by skipping any questions they are uncomfortable answering. Participants can withdraw at any time by closing their browser window.

- 7b. Benefits – Describe whether participants will benefit directly from participating in the study. If yes, describe the benefit. And, describe generalizable benefits resulting from the study.

Participants will not benefit directly from participating in the study. However, the results of the study may benefit the education of administrators and job satisfaction strategies for middle space leaders in the future.

8. Describe the provisions to maintain confidentiality of data, including collection, transmission, and storage.

Identify platforms used to collect and store study data. For EXEMPT research, the AU IRB recommends AU BOX or using an AU issued and encrypted device. If a data collection form will be used, submit a copy.

No personally identifiable information such as name, employer, email address, etc. will be collected. Participants decision about whether to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize their future relations with the university, their employer, or the state department of education.

Revised 02/01/2022

- a. If applicable, submit a copy of the data management plan or data use agreement.

9. Describe the provisions included in the research to protect the privacy interests of participants (e.g., others will not overhear conversations with potential participants, individuals will not be publicly identified or embarrassed).

The survey is online via Qualtrics and anonymous. It will be sent via email, so participants will take the survey at the time and location of their choosing.

10. Additional Information and/or attachments.

In the space below, provide any additional information you believe may help the IRB review of the proposed research. If attachments are included, list the attachments below. Attachments may include recruitment materials, consent documents, site permissions, IRB approvals from other institutions, data use agreements, data collection form, CITI training documentation, etc.

Exempt Review Application, CITI Program Training Reports, CITI Program Training Certificates, Information Letter, Recruitment Email, Survey Questions

Required Signatures (If a student PI is identified in item 1.a, the EXEMPT application must be re-signed and updated at every revision by the student PI and faculty advisor. The signature of the department head is required only on the initial submission of the EXEMPT application, regardless of PI. Staff and faculty PI submissions require the PI signature on all version, the department head signature on the original submission)

Signature of Principal Investigator: Kelsey Denson Date: 6-18-2022

Signature of Faculty Advisor (If applicable): Ellen Reames Hahn Date: 6.18.22

Signature of Dept. Head: James Satterfield Date: 6/21/2022

Version Date: [Click or tap to enter a date.](#)



AUBURN UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

INFORMATION LETTER

for a Research Study entitled

“Middle Space Leaders: Professional Quality of Life”

You are invited to participate in a research study to determine if there is a relationship between the professional quality of life of middle space leaders in public K-12 school systems across the state of Alabama and mindfulness. The study is being conducted by Kelsey Deason, Graduate Student, under the direction of Dr. Ellen Hahn in the Auburn University Department of Educational Foundations Leadership and Technology. You are invited to participate because you are a middle space leader in a public K-12 school system in the state of Alabama and are age 19 or older.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to respond to twenty-eight survey questions on the Qualtrics platform. You will be asked four demographic questions, nine professional quality of life questions, and fifteen mindfulness questions. Your total time commitment will be approximately five minutes.

The risks associated with participating in this study are the potential for psychological distress and discomfort associated with answering questions related to your professional quality of life, stress, and mindfulness. There are no anticipated risk associated with this study. You can minimize these risks by choosing to stop at any point or by skipping any questions that you are uncomfortable answering. You can withdraw at any time by closing your window browser. Your personal information will not be collected.

If you participate in this study, you will not receive any direct benefits, however, there are generalizable benefits such as the results of the study may benefit the education of administrators and job satisfaction strategies for middle space leaders in the future. If you participate in this

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 36849-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460; Fax: 334-844-3072

www.auburn.edu

study, you may request access to the final report findings by emailing the researcher at kad0073@auburn.edu.

You will not be compensated for participating in this study. There is likewise no cost to you to participate.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by closing your browser window. Once you have submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology or your school system.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. Information collected through your participation will be used to add to the body of research about the professional quality of life of middle space leaders.

If you have questions about this study, please contact Dr. Ellen Hahn at reamsch@auburn.edu or Kelsey Deason at kad0073@auburn.edu or via phone at (205) 706-1859.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBchair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE SURVEY LINK BELOW. YOU MAY PRINT A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION LETTER TO KEEP.

[Survey Link](#)

E-MAIL INVITATION FOR ON-LINE SURVEY

Dear Alabama Middle Space Leader,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Education at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to research the relationship between the professional quality of life of middle space leaders in k-12 public school systems across the state of Alabama and mindfulness. You may participate if you are a central office staff member at a k-12 public school system in the state of Alabama. However, this study does exempt superintendents.

Participants will be asked to complete a survey, which should take approximately five minutes. The survey contains items concerning your job satisfaction and mindfulness practices. You will also be asked to report your age, gender, and yours of experience as a middle space leader.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You may skip any question or stop at any time. There are no known risks or discomforts involved in answering the survey. To assure anonymity of responses, I am asking that you do **not** provide your name or any other identifying information on the survey. While participation in this research will provide no direct benefit to you immediately, the results of the study may benefit the education of administrators and job satisfaction strategies for middle space leaders in the future.

If you would like to know more information about this study, an information letter can be obtained by sending me an e-mail at kad0073@auburn.edu. If you decide to participate after reading the letter, you can access the survey from a link in the attached letter.

If you have any questions, please contact me at kad0073@auburn.edu or my advisor, Dr. Ellen Hahn, at reamseh@auburn.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kelsey Deason

Default Question Block

Are you currently serving as a middle space leader in a k-12 public school system in the state of Alabama?

(director, coordinator, specialist, supervisor, assistant superintendent, etc.)

- Yes
 No

When you help people you have direct contact with their lives. As you may have found, your compassion for those you help can affect you in positive and negative ways. Below are some questions about your experiences, both positive and negative, as a middle space leader. Consider each of the following questions about you and your current work situation. Select the number that honestly reflects how frequently you experienced these things in the last 30 days.

	1=Never	2=Rarely	3=Sometimes	4=Often	5=Very Often
I think that I might have been affected by the traumatic stress of those I work with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel trapped by my job as a middle space leader.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like my work as a middle space leader.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel depressed because of the traumatic experiences of the people I work with.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My work makes me feel satisfied.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel worn out because of my work as a middle space leader.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel overwhelmed because my case load seems endless.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1=Never	2=Rarely	3=Sometimes	4=Often	5=Very Often
As a result of my job, I have intrusive, frightening thoughts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am happy that I chose to do this work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Below is a collection of statements about your everyday experience. Using the 1-6 scale below, please indicate how infrequently or frequently you currently have each experience. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

	1=almost never	2=very infrequently	3=somewhat infrequently	4=somewhat frequently	5=very frequently	6=almost always
I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I break or spill things because of carelessness, not paying attention, or thinking of something else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend to walk quickly to get where I'm going without paying attention to what I experience along the way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I tend not to notice feelings of physical tension or discomfort until they really grab my attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I forget a person's name almost as soon as I've been told it for the first time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	1=almost never	2=very infrequently	3=somewhat infrequently	4=somewhat frequently	5=very frequently	6=almost always
It seems I am "running on automatic," without much awareness of what I'm doing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I get so focused on the goal I want to achieve that I lose touch with what I'm doing right now to get there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I'm doing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I drive places on 'automatic pilot' and then wonder why I went there.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself preoccupied with the future or the past.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find myself doing things without paying attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I snack without being aware that I'm eating.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What is your age?

- 21-30
- 31-40

- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / third gender
- Prefer not to say

How many years of experience as a middle space leader in k-12 public education do you have?

- 0-3
- 4-10
- 11-20
- 21+

Powered by Qualtrics



Completion Date 08-Jun-2020
Expiration Date 07-Jun-2025
Record ID 36895135

This is to certify that:

Kelsey Deason

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Responsible Conduct of Research for Social and Behavioral
(Curriculum Group)
Social, Behavioral and Education Sciences RCR
(Course Learner Group)
1 - RCR
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wfc8c128e-b87b-4058-820e-b47b2608b799-36895135



Completion Date 21-May-2022
Expiration Date 20-May-2025
Record ID 42804074

This is to certify that:

Kelsey Deason

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

IRB Additional Modules
(Curriculum Group)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wceaae93-f522-4cb1-a919-449c36699d0d-42804074



Completion Date 31-May-2021
Expiration Date 30-May-2024
Record ID 42804075

This is to certify that:

Kelsey Deason

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher

(Curriculum Group)

IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w89968a71-263d-40a5-97fc-ad02f0b726d5-42804075

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

• **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
 • **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
 • **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
 • **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
 • **Phone:** 334-844-3067

• **Curriculum Group:** Responsible Conduct of Research for Social and Behavioral
 • **Course Learner Group:** Social, Behavioral and Education Sciences RCR
 • **Stage:** Stage 1 - RCR
 • **Description:** This course is for investigators, staff and students with an interest or focus in **Social and Behavioral** research. This course contains text, embedded case studies AND quizzes.

• **Record ID:** 36895135
 • **Completion Date:** 08-Jun-2020
 • **Expiration Date:** 07-Jun-2025
 • **Minimum Passing:** 80
 • **Reported Score*:** 96

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Authorship (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16597)	07-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Collaborative Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16598)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16599)	08-Jun-2020	4/5 (80%)
Data Management (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16600)	08-Jun-2020	4/5 (80%)
Mentoring (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16602)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Peer Review (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16603)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research Misconduct (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16604)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Plagiarism (RCR-Basic) (ID: 15156)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research Involving Human Subjects (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13568)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citi-program.org/verify/?keca0fcc7-2e0f-40e4-b6a1-fa8017807284-36895135

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 Email: support@citi-program.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citi-program.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 334-844-3067

- **Curriculum Group:** Responsible Conduct of Research for Social and Behavioral
- **Course Learner Group:** Social, Behavioral and Education Sciences RCR
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - RCR
- **Description:** This course is for investigators, staff and students with an interest or focus in **Social and Behavioral** research. This course contains text, embedded case studies AND quizzes.

- **Record ID:** 36805135
- **Report Date:** 18-Jun-2022
- **Current Score**:** 96

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Research Involving Human Subjects (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13566)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Plagiarism (RCR-Basic) (ID: 15156)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Authorship (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16597)	07-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Collaborative Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16598)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16599)	08-Jun-2020	4/5 (80%)
Data Management (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16600)	08-Jun-2020	4/5 (80%)
Mentoring (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16602)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Peer Review (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16603)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)
Research Misconduct (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16604)	08-Jun-2020	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?kca0fcc7-2e0f-40e4-b6a1-fa8017807264-36895135

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 Email: support@citiprogram.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2 COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this [Requirements Report](#) reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 334-844-3067

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB Additional Modules
- **Course Learner Group:** Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 42804074
- **Completion Date:** 21-May-2022
- **Expiration Date:** 20-May-2025
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	21-May-2022	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citi-program.org/verify/?kb2905dbd-7522-473f-9cf9-44c43123948a-42804074

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citi-program.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: <https://www.citi-program.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this [Transcript Report](#) reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

• **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
• **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
• **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
• **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
• **Phone:** 334-844-3067

• **Curriculum Group:** IRB Additional Modules
• **Course Learner Group:** Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE
• **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

• **Record ID:** 42804074
• **Report Date:** 18-Jun-2022
• **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	21-May-2022	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citi-program.org/verify/7xb2905dbd-7522-473f-9cf9-44c43123948a-42804074

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citi-program.org
Phone: 888-529-5929
Web: <https://www.citi-program.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 334-844-3067

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Key Personnel (including AU Faculty, Staff and Students) and Faculty Advisors involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 42804075
- **Completion Date:** 31-May-2021
- **Expiration Date:** 30-May-2024
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score*:** 100

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	31-May-2021	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citi-program.org/verify/7k18b13156-dc5e-45d4-a7f5-2bf55474ac33-42804075

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 Email: support@citi-program.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citi-program.org>

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2 COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this [Transcript Report](#) reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Kelsey Deason (ID: 9166289)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Auburn University (ID: 964)
- **Institution Email:** kad0073@auburn.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Educational Leadership
- **Phone:** 334-844-3067

- **Curriculum Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Description:** Choose this group to satisfy CITI training requirements for Key Personnel (including AU Faculty, Staff and Students) and Faculty Advisors involved primarily in Social/Behavioral Research with human subjects.

- **Record ID:** 42804075
- **Report Date:** 18-Jun-2022
- **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES

	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	31-May-2021	3/3 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)
Unanticipated Problems and Reporting Requirements in Social and Behavioral Research (ID: 14928)	31-May-2021	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/2k18b13156-dc5e-45d4-a7f5-2bf55474ac33-42804075

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org

Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>



Completion Date 30-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 29-Jan-2025
Record ID 48419823

This is to certify that:

Ellen Hahn

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
IRB # 2 Social and Behavioral Emphasis - AU Personnel
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w52f24c75-b9be-4ac1-a3f3-77aea434f971-48419823



Completion Date 30-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 29-Jan-2025
Record ID 48419807

This is to certify that:

Ellen Hahn

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

IRB Additional Modules
(Curriculum Group)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w68c8bf7-704b-41eb-8c8f-1d73bbf2340c-48419807



Completion Date 30-Jan-2022
Expiration Date 29-Jan-2027
Record ID 45348324

This is to certify that:

Ellen Hahn

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Responsible Conduct of Research for Social and Behavioral
(Curriculum Group)
Social, Behavioral and Education Sciences RCR
(Course Learner Group)
2 - RCR Refresher
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Auburn University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wcbddc4a4-b34f-4ec0-aa87-8c144754b1e6-45348324

6.23.22

TO: IRBsubmit@auburn.edu

FROM: Kelsey Deason

SUBJECT: Deason Protocol Review Request #22-295, "Middle Space Leader: Professional Quality of Life"

Below is a list of changes made to the above-named protocol, based on IRB's requested revisions.

After Talking with Sally Headley about requested revisions, initial Exempt Application did not require new signatures.

IRB Request Revisions:

Information Letter: Print on departmental letterhead **DONE**

Describe in paragraph 3 that no risks are anticipated. **DONE**

Add generalizable benefits to paragraph 4. **DONE**

Waiver of documentation of consent requested in the EXEMPT application form and research activities are performed online – delete the signatures section. **DONE**

IRB Revision Memorandum
Deason Protocol Review Request #22-295
“Middle Space Leader: Professional Quality of Life”
Kelsey Deason

Revisions to the Information Letter are required.

1. Print on departmental letterhead.

- Letter was printed on departmental letterhead

2. Describe in paragraph 3 that no risks are anticipated.

- **“The risks associated with participating in this study are the potential for psychological distress and discomfort associated with answering questions related to your professional quality of life, stress, and mindfulness. There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. You can minimize these risks by choosing to stop at any point or by skipping any questions that you are uncomfortable answering. You can withdraw at any time by closing your window browser.”**

3. Add generalizable benefits to paragraph 4.

- **“however, there are generalizable benefits such as the results of the study may benefit the education of administrators and job satisfaction strategies for middle space leaders in the future.”**

4. Waiver of documentation of consent requested in the EXEMPT application form and research activities are performed online - delete the signatures section.

- **“IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE CLICK ON THE SURVEY LINK BELOW.”**

-Signature lines for participant were deleted

Linked the survey to the words “Survey Link”.