

# Adapting an Evidence Based Burnout Intervention for Special Educators

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## BACKGROUND

- Special education teacher attrition and retention is an unsolved problem
- Attrition creates financial burdens for schools, decreases organizational stability, lowers productivity and is associated with poor student outcomes (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008).
- Burnout is a primary cause of attrition and has been indirectly linked to poorer student IEP goal attainment through lower teaching quality and student engagement (Wong, Ruble, Yu, McGrew, 2018).
- Interventions targeting burnout may decrease attrition and increase student outcomes. We adapted an evidence-based burnout intervention, Burnout Reduction: Enhanced Awareness, Tools, Handouts, and Education (BREATHE; Salyers et al., 2011) originally developed for community mental health workers.

## OBJECTIVES

- To describe the process of adapting BREATHE-EASE (Evidence-Based Activities for Educators) for special education teachers

### What is B.R.E.A.T.H.E.?

BREATHE conceptualizes burnout as a stress-related, mental health concern

- Identify personal warning signs and triggers
- Incorporate coping/renewal and wellness approaches
- Adopt burnout prevention principles
- Practice strategies and exercises
- Develop personal plan/toolkit based on individual needs



### Modules

1. Core contemplative practices (e.g., deep breathing, mindfulness, imagery)

2. Cognitive practices (e.g., gratitude, reconnect with meaning/values)

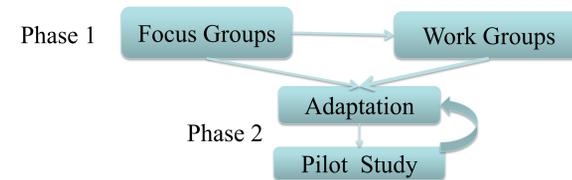
3. Physical strategies (e.g., sleep, yoga)

4. Time management approaches

5. Building social support and effective relationships

## METHODS

How did we adapt BREATHE for Teachers?



- Four focus groups (2 for teachers, 2 for administrators) in two states,  $N_{\text{special ed teachers}} = 15$ ;  $N_{\text{administrators}} = 15$  generated answers to semi-structured questions
- Four work groups ( $N_{\text{workgroup}} = 9$ ), including teachers and administrators meeting online through Zoom, reviewed and validated focus group results
- The *focus groups* lasted about 1hr and were recorded and transcribed.
- An initial codebook was created from themes derived from the literature on burnout. All codes were cross-checked against themes appearing in a preliminary reading of all transcripts. Discrepancies in codes were discussed until consensus was met.
- Based on focus group results, we revised BREATHE to meet the needs of special education teachers. Identified revisions were shared with work group. *Work groups* confirmed adaptations and integrated suggestions expressed by focus group participants.
- Work group's feedback was used for further revisions.

Focus Group Questions	Common Themes	BREATHE Modules Adaptation
<b>What is the cause of burnout?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interactions with parents</li> <li>• Lack of understanding and support from administrators</li> <li>• Constant crisis management</li> <li>• Paper work; Teachers spread too thin; Teachers have to teach other teachers</li> <li>• Constantly evolving expectations or rules</li> <li>• Accountability to scores</li> <li>• Lack of respect from general education teachers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mod 1:</b> Core contemplative practices - Keep; Adapt content specific for special education teachers</p> <p><b>Mod 2:</b> Cognitive practices - Keep; Adapt content specific for special education teachers; Spend more time on principles of cognitive-behavioral approaches and coping strategies</p>
<b>What are helpful approaches to reduce burnout?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach how to have difficult conversations with parents</li> <li>• Better manage time</li> <li>• How to disconnect from work</li> <li>• More support from other special education and general education teachers and from administration</li> <li>• Have better relationships with students</li> <li>• Realistic expectations around special education from administrators</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mod 3:</b> Physical strategies - Integrate into contemplative practice and time management</p> <p><b>Mod 4:</b> Time management approaches - Reduce emphasis on scheduling, increase focus on setting boundaries; adapt content specific for special education teachers</p>
<b>What is the best format to deliver a burnout intervention?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least some in-person training</li> <li>• A multi-modal approach: online or app-based approaches + an in-person workshop</li> <li>• Administrators could also benefit from their own training in how to better support teachers</li> <li>• Ideally, our training should involve a teacher as a facilitator for credibility and buy in</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mod 5:</b> Building social support- Create a network opportunity to build social support virtually; increase emphasis on communication with administrators and parents</p> <p><b>Structure:</b> Include initial face-to-face training, followed by online booster sessions</p>
<b>What are potential barriers to implementing an intervention?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is stigma around self-reflection or asking for help; Teachers expressed a fear of repercussions if they admit they are burned out</li> <li>• A lack of time, mental resources to add more commitments, and resources to cover people within school hours</li> <li>• Too much training/ professional development required already and no one wants to socialize outside of work</li> </ul>	<p><b>Enhancements:</b>            Online peer-to-peer support            Webinars for administrators on ways to support teachers and reinforce the skills learned in BREATHE-EASE</p>

## DISCUSSION

- Using a multi-phasic approach, we adapted an evidence based burnout intervention, BREATHE to target and be responsive to the needs of special education teachers.
- The methods applied in this study may be helpful for other studies adapting EBPs.
- Future directions include an initial pre-post pilot test of the adapted intervention followed by further refinement and final testing in an RCT.

### References

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### Acknowledgements

This work was supported by grant # R324A170021 from the IES.