

Throughout my life, I have grappled with feelings of inadequacy and the pressure to be everything for everyone, often neglecting my own needs and passions in the process. As a Harmonizer, I find value in the connections that I make with others, and thrive on showing support and building relationships. But this dedication to others often comes at the expense of my well-being. This pressure was exacerbated when I became the sole female administrator in my district. This struggle has hindered my ability to maintain focus and organization, which are typically my personal strengths. Recognizing the profound impact this has had on both my professional and personal life, I am committed to making changes that promote self-care, personal growth, and resilience, not only for myself but as a model for women within my educational community.

My action research project combines these personal goals with our school theme for the year: “Better Together: Stronger, Smarter, Happier, Healthier”. It is important for me as the leader of my building to demonstrate buy-in and commitment to the mantra our school had embraced for the year. Therefore, the purpose of my action research is to initiate a more defined focus and balance between my personal and professional life. As a soon-to-be “empty nester,” it’s important for me to find purpose and happiness in ways other than through the activities of my children! I am well aware that the principles of strength, intelligence, health, and happiness are vital to our overall well-being and performance, but I am eager to find out what differences will emerge in my personal and professional life if I truly make these things a priority for ME as a wife, mother, daughter, and administrator.

Background

With this purpose, I wondered, **“How will an inner focus on my physical and mental well-being change the way I lead my building?”**

To gain insights into my wondering, I made a commitment to concentrate on four specific areas of my life that were defined through our school theme:

- SMARTER: Enroll in graduate classes for a Reading/Dyslexia Endorsement (a goal I have had for many years)
- STRONGER: Commit to some type of physical activity with a goal of four days per week
- HAPPIER: Focus on creating intentional quality time with my family and friends at least once per week (i.e. a movie with my daughter, a night out with my husband, or a visit with my ailing grandmother)
- HEALTHIER: Hydrate - could I work up to drinking a gallon of water per day? I often find myself running through the day without stopping for a meal or even a drink of water.

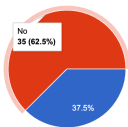
As I began in January, 2023, I struggled to find a quick, but meaningful way to keep track of my activities. My plan was to record information on my online calendar, which I use in every aspect of my life. However, this was cumbersome and ineffective. A colleague suggested that I create a Google form, which greatly enhanced my ability to view my progress in a meaningful way. At the end of each day, I recorded my activity in each of the four areas. But, I soon realized that I also needed to know how these activities were affecting my overall well-being. I added a rating scale to track my stress level, sleep quality, relationships with family, and interactions at school. I used this form from January 3 - March 4, 2023.

Findings

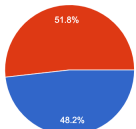
As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include:

- I was able to create new habits quicker than anticipated
- Lack of structure causes my stress level to increase dramatically
- It is vital for my well-being to have a defined time to leave work

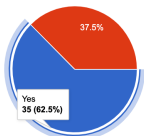
New habits:



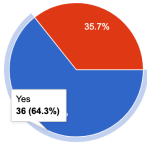
Exercise proved to be the most difficult for me to complete, but I attribute this to the season in which I was tracking data. I enjoy quiet walks outdoors to collect my thoughts and enjoy a podcast. The weather was cold, so the exercise I was able to do was weight training and elliptical workouts at the local gym. But, because my goal was to increase physical activity four days a week, I was able to complete this expectation five out of the eight weeks.



Water intake was my greatest challenge and I was able to drink a gallon of water per day nearly 50% of the time. Even on the days I was not able to meet my goal, I was much more aware of my hydration status.

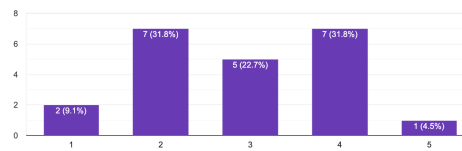


I began my Reading Specialist license through Indiana University on January 9, which required a great deal of research and homework outside of my working hours. Although this was a challenge, this first class reminded me how much I love learning. I am eager to continue this work in the fall semester, 2023.



Uninterrupted, dedicated family time was an important goal for me. Whether it was a few hours spent with my ailing grandmother, to a shopping trip with my mom, or remodel work on my daughter's new house, I was able to take the time focus entirely on my family or friends 64% of the time, which was much more than my goal of once per week.

Within my Google form, I also included a section to record observations of the day. It was in this "virtual journal" that I realized some of my most important takeaways from the action research. I crave organization, as verified by my Thinker phase. I value productivity and how my time is spent. I need a clear schedule.



As seen in my data, my stress level increased dramatically on days that I wasn't prepared or had an upheaval in my schedule. Although this is something I cannot prevent, I can better prepare for those feelings and work through them. It was also evident that on days I had a family event to look forward to, it decreased my anxiety during work hours.

As challenging as exercise was for me to fit in, it was evident that my energy level and enthusiasm increased on the days I was able to complete some type of physical activity after leaving work. And, finally, my water intake had the most surprising benefits. On days that I was able to successfully drink a gallon of water, I slept better, clearly had more energy, and snacked less.

Conclusions

Over the nine weeks I tracked data, I was able to learn a lot about myself as a professional, but also as a wife and mother. A study by Kottkamp and McCallum (2014) found that female principals often experience conflict between their professional and personal identities, leading to increased stress and feelings of guilt. These feelings are very real for me and I was struggling with them more than I even realized.

My action research provided me with outlets that I can now prove will make a difference in my overall well-being. I have a better understanding of my preferred rhythms. I need quiet time in the morning without distractions. This revelation changed my work day. I arrive to school early so I can have undistracted time to prepare. I struggle to maintain the expectations as a wife and mother if I don't leave by 5:00pm. Knowing this, I try to ensure I leave as often as possible before this time. I need to allow myself time to "turn off" without feelings of guilt. As a Harmonizer, my first-degree distress is, "I must please you to feel worthwhile." This is a distress I feel often.

Female are often underrepresented in educational leadership positions. Now that I am experiencing this, I am thankful more than ever before that I waited to pursue administration until later in my career. I love my job, but it's hard work! Without a female mentor in my workplace, it's been difficult finding balance. My action research has provided me with the tools I need to be a successful wife, mother, and administrator...which is the prayer I pray every morning.

References

Brown, B. (2013). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.

Desautels, L.L. (2020). *Connections Over Compliance: Rewriting Our Perceptions of Discipline*. United States: Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing.

Kottkamp, R.B., & McCallum, C.. (2014). Women Principals: Career Trajectory, Career Longevity, and Work-Life Balance. In M.L. Skrla (Ed.), *Women's Leadership in Education: Reconstructing the Female Principalship* (pp. 51-74). Teachers College Press.

Regier, PhD, N. (2020). *Seeing People Through: Unleash Your Leadership Potential with the Process Communication Model*. United States: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

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Creating Balance & Boundaries



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Balance

I have been struggling with feelings of inadequacy in all areas of my life: trying to be everything for everyone and often forgetting about my own needs or passions.

Structure

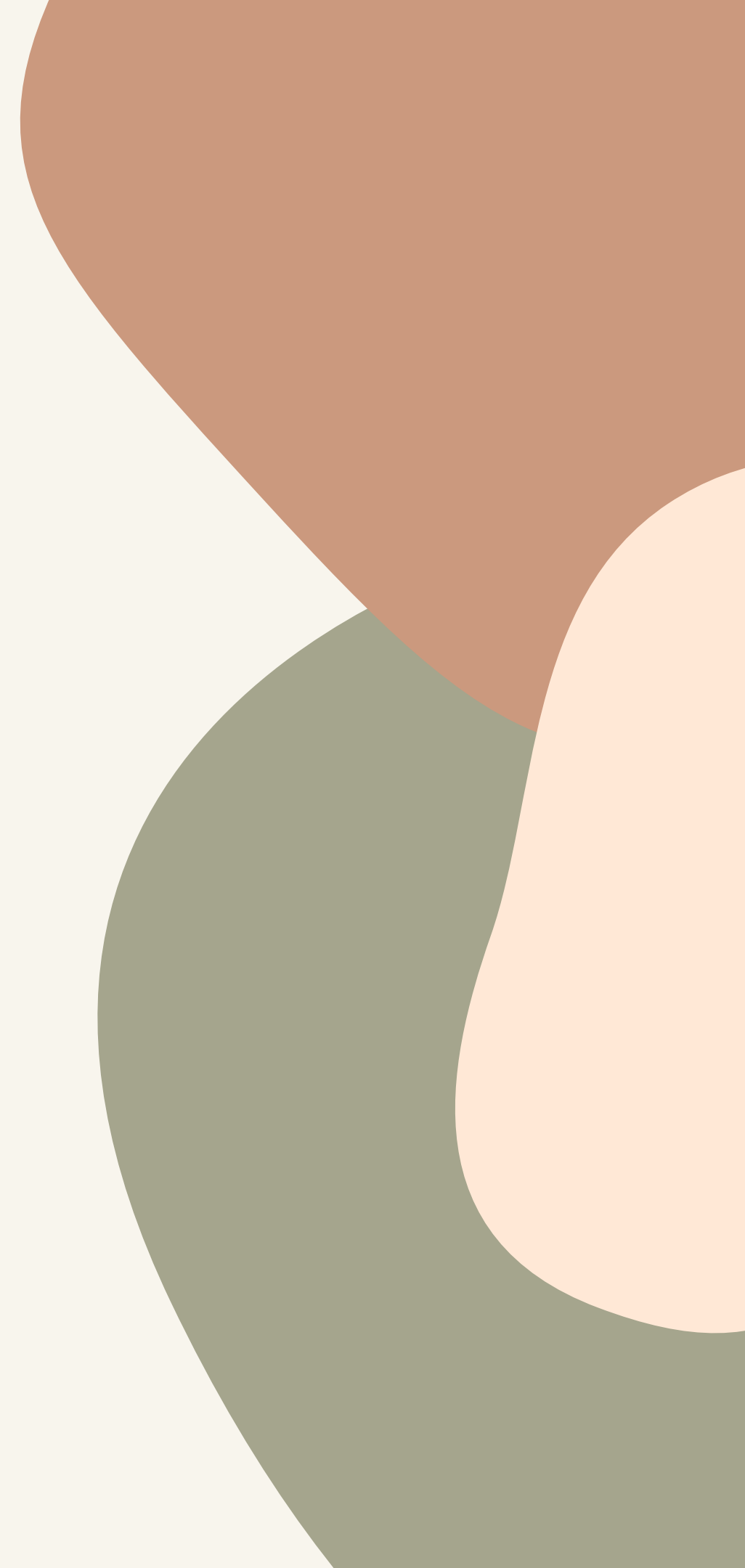
I've found that I have lacked focus and organization which have been my personal strengths..

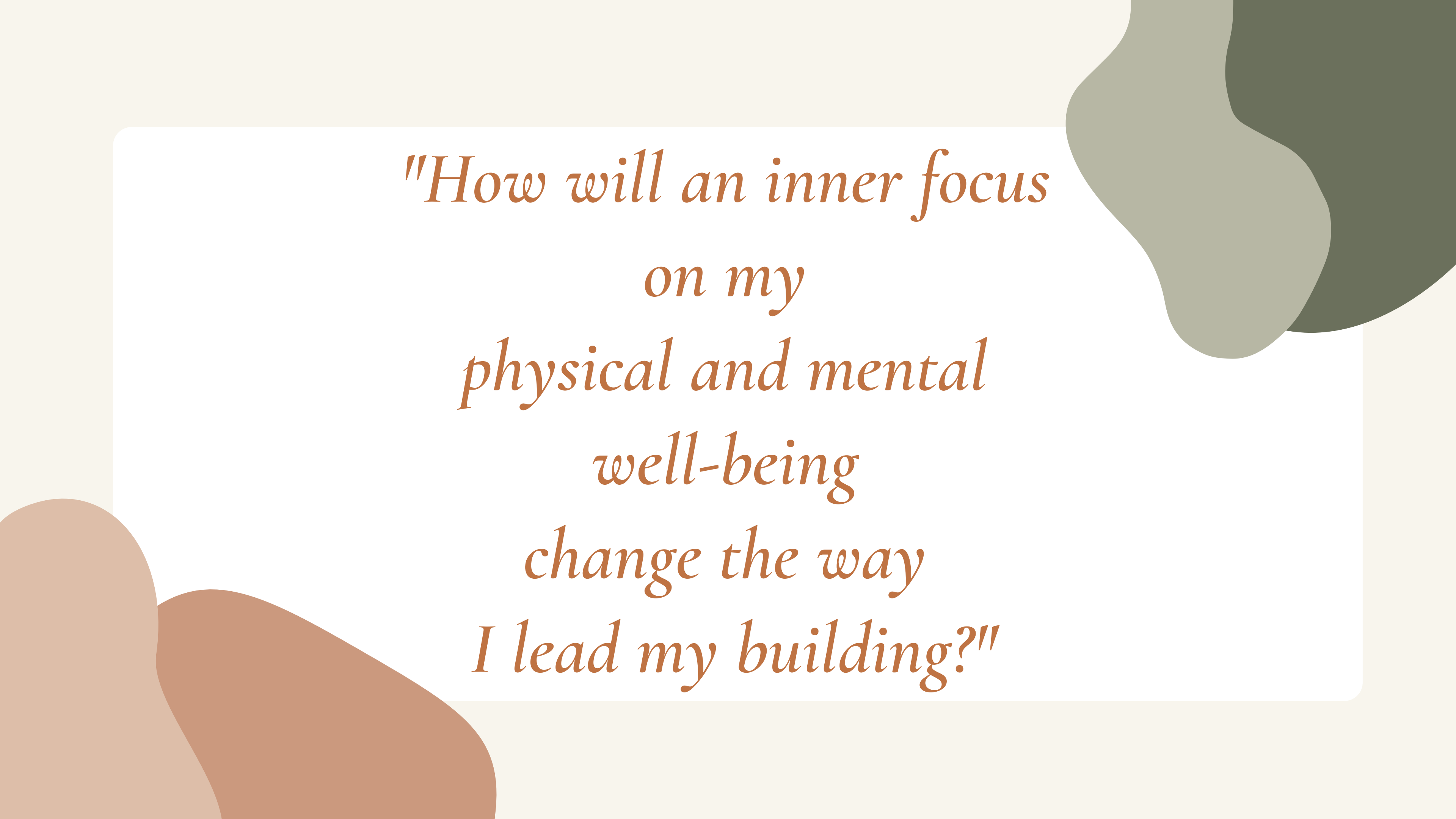


This has had an impact on my professional and personal life.

**Therefore, the
purpose of my action
inquiry was to...**

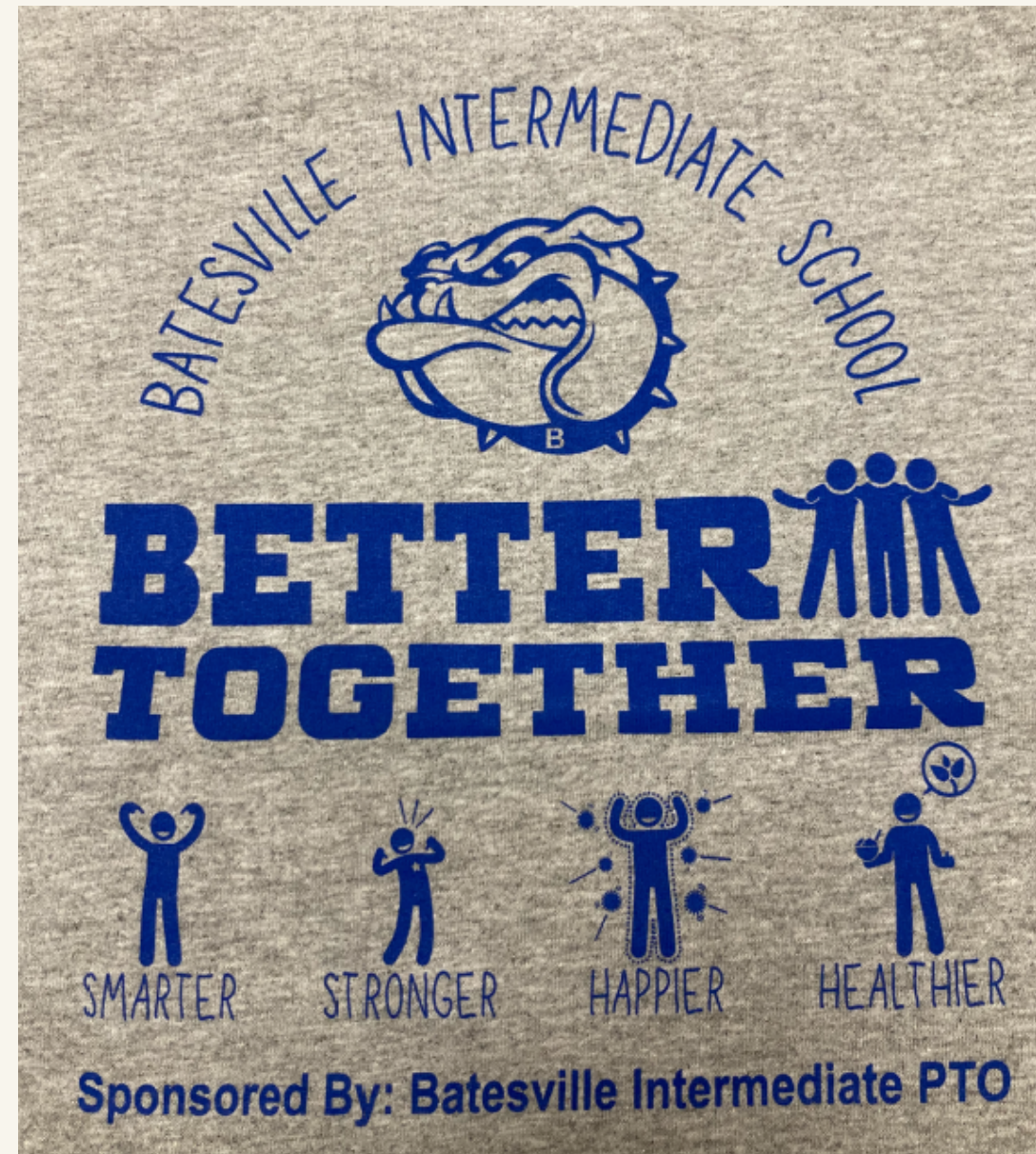
To provide a more defined focus and balance
between my personal and professional life.





*"How will an inner focus
on my
physical and mental
well-being
change the way
I lead my building?"*

BIS School-Wide Theme

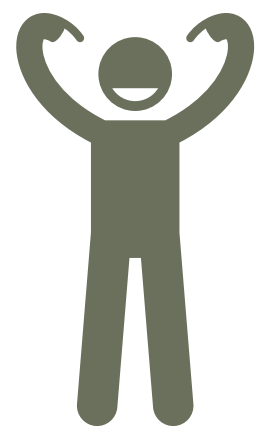


22-23

Focus Areas

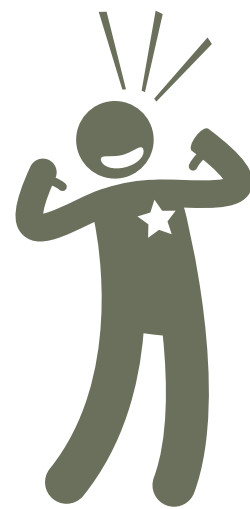
Smarter

*Indiana University
Reading Specialist /
Dyslexia
Certification*



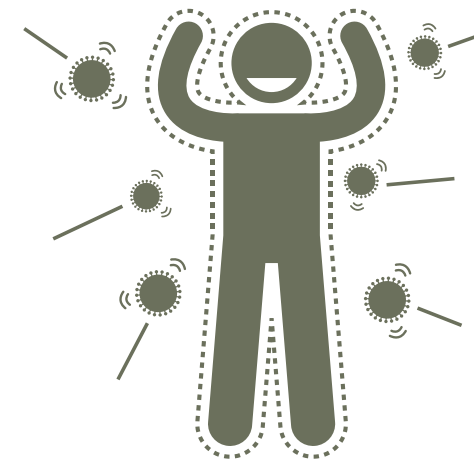
Stronger

*Exercise
Walk / Weights
3-4 days/week*



Happier

*Family/Friend/
Personal Time
Once per week*



Healthier

*One gallon of water
daily*



Data Collection

- Date
- Week of...
- Appropriate Water Intake?
- Exercise?
- Dedicated Time for Schoolwork?
- Dedicated Time for Family?
- Stress Level
- Sleep Quality
- Following a Schedule
- Relationships with Family?
- Interactions at School?
- Observations.

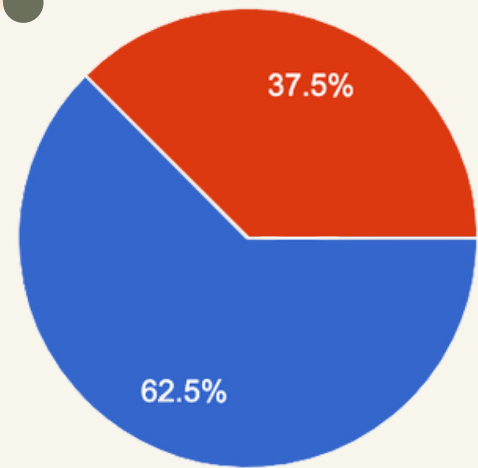
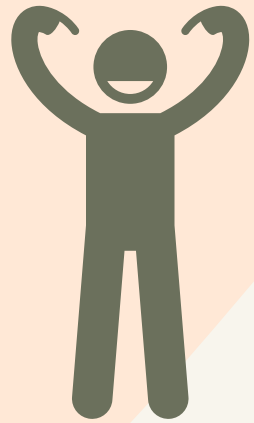
I've invited you to fill out a form:

IPLI Data Tracking

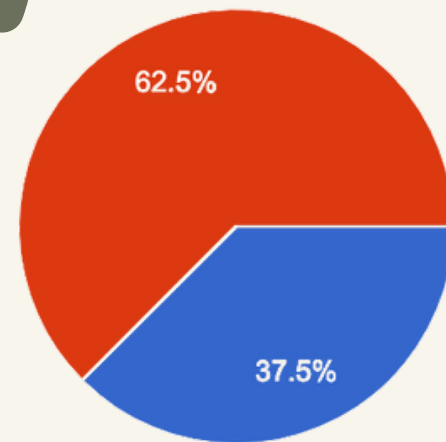
Happier, Healthier, Smarter, Stronger

FILL OUT FORM

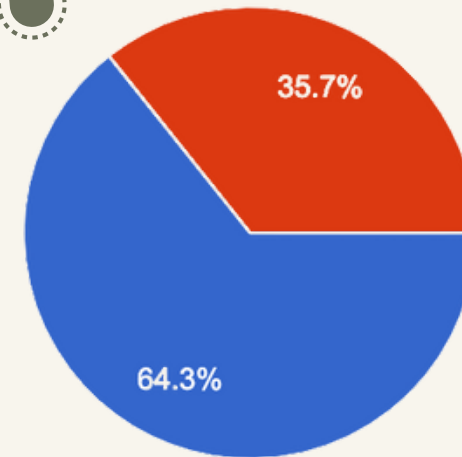




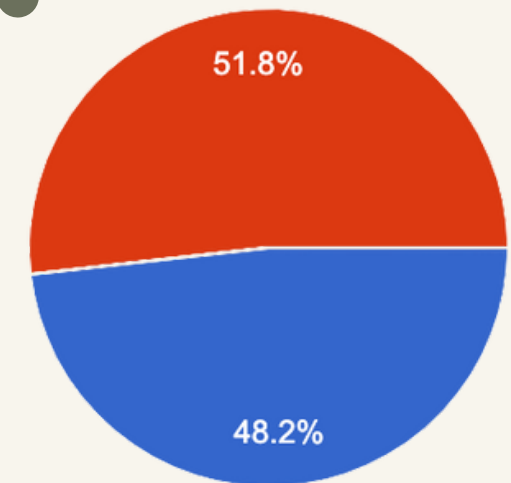
Schoolwork



Exercise



Dedicated
Family Time



Water Intake

Data Analysis

[Link to responses](#)

Yes
No

My Discoveries

Structure provides balance

My relationships at school have never faltered. The data was clear that I put my school relationships above all else. (Early arrival to work, exercise late afternoon, allow uninterrupted family time, quiet evening time, and weekend mornings for school)

Water intake is essential

Increased energy, improved quality sleep, decreased stress levels

Daily solitude increases positive outcomes

Uninterrupted quiet time allows me to focus on my priorities.

Where I Am Headed Next...

1

Continue a daily schedule

2

Focus on balance!

***Early arrival to level–set for the day**

***Leave school by 5:00 pm**

***"Be present" at home**

***Hydrate!**

***Enjoy activity without guilt**



Bibliography

Brown, B. (2013). *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. United Kingdom: Penguin Books Limited.

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