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### Mental Health and Mindfulness: A Homeroom Curriculum at Benton Hall Academy

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# Mental Health and Mindfulness: A Homeroom Curriculum at Benton Hall Academy

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Expert Mentor: Mary Reynolds, Dean of Academics



## BENTON HALL ACADEMY

### MISSION STATEMENT

“Benton Hall Academy offers a curriculum designed to challenge each student to his or her highest intellectual and creative abilities. The school’s program strives to prepare each student academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally, through individualized instruction, to work to his or her potential and to make a successful transition into the workplace, or into a higher learning experience. The highest priority is given to the development of sensitive, autonomous human beings who relate well with others, know how to learn, and how to make wise choices.”

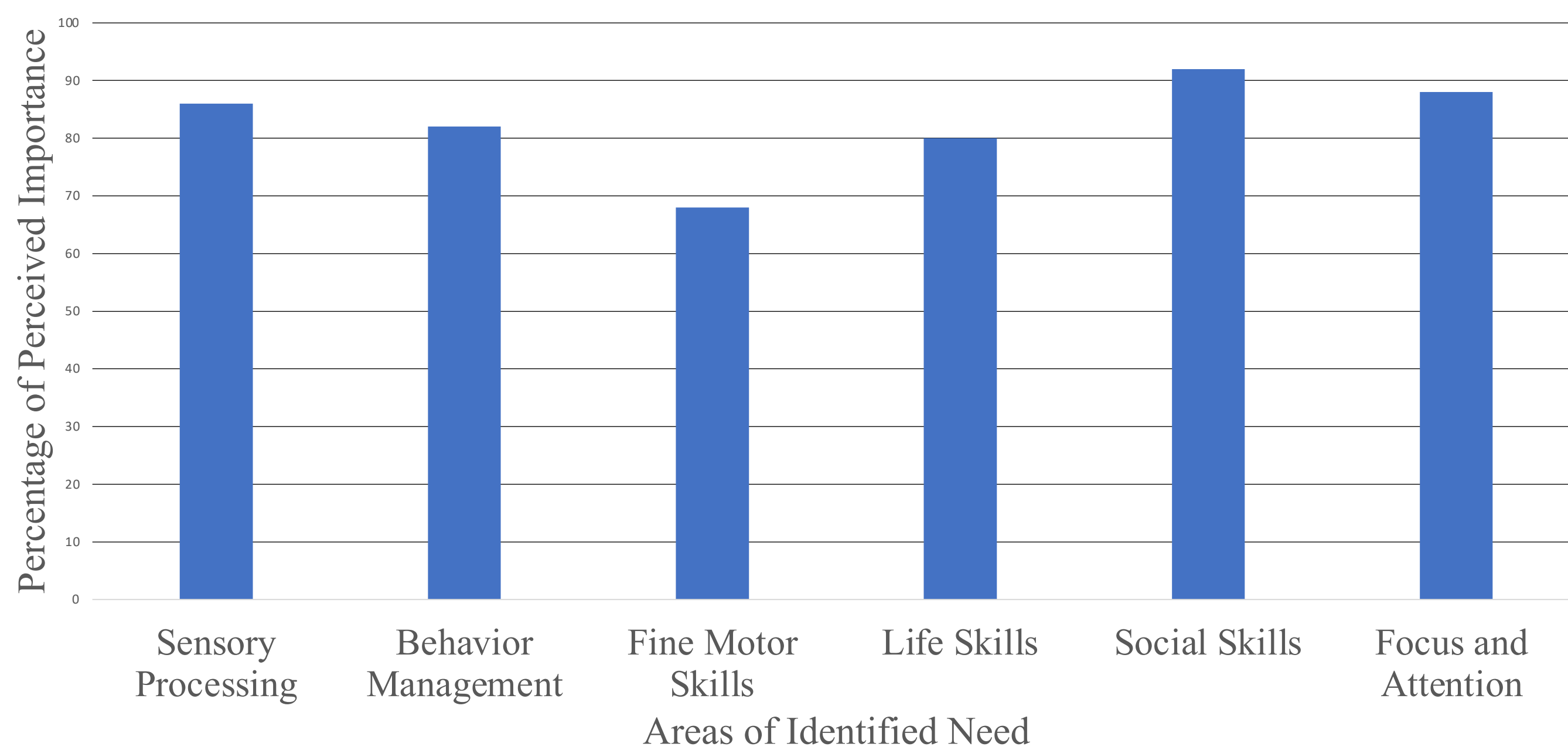
### VISION STATEMENT

“The faculty, staff, and students of Benton Hall Academy will provide a safe, caring, and inclusive environment that will advance knowledge and promote integrity.”

## IDENTIFIED AGENCY NEEDS

- A curriculum for the lower and middle school students to utilize during the homeroom period.
- Materials focused on mindfulness, mental health, social skills, and attention.

Benton Hall Needs Reassessment



## CAPSTONE PROJECT GOALS

1. Explore and gain knowledge of the educational needs of children diagnosed with developmental and intellectual disabilities by reviewing relevant, recent research.
2. Conduct a focus group with educators and faculty at Benton Hall to identify current skill levels of students and most problematic classroom areas.
3. Create a homeroom-based curriculum for current and future teachers, including a student workbook and corresponding teacher guide.
4. Gather feedback from teachers and mentors about curriculum and implement suggestions to current and future teachers.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

- This project resulted in a 27-week curriculum based in mindfulness, mental health, social skills, and attention. The topics are broken up into nine-week segments, and each section has a corresponding teacher guide to assist in implementation and to provide further instructions.
- The curriculum was provided virtually through a shared google drive, as well as a hardcopy print version for the students.
- The curriculum highlights occupational therapy’s unique contribution to the following areas of occupation:
  - **Health Management:** activities with the goal of improving or maintaining health to support participation in occupations<sup>2</sup>
  - **Education:** activities necessary for participation in school environment<sup>2</sup>
  - **Social Participation:** activities that support social interactions<sup>2</sup>
- A corresponding literature review that encompasses current and relevant research on the benefits of mindfulness and a social emotional curriculum on attention and mental health in school aged children.

### Week 19: Thursday

#### Topic of the Week: Friendship

How are you feeling today? Write down anything on your mind this morning...

**Journal: Friendship**  
Think about a good friend of yours. What makes them a good friend? How do you show them you care about their friendship?

**Positive Affirmation:** Rewrite the phrase and say it to yourself. Think about what the phrase means to you.  
“I have goals and dreams that I will achieve.”

**Mindful Minute**  
Focus on your breathing as you trace your finger along the maze and work your way to the finish.

### Week 4: Monday

#### Topic of the Week: Expressing Emotions

How are you feeling today? Write down anything on your mind this morning...

**Expressing Emotions:** is a healthy way to accept the emotions that we are built to feel. Healthy emotional expression allows you to understand what you feel and then move on.

Circle below the better option for expressing different emotions:

Angry:	Yelling and screaming at who/what made you angry	Take 5 deep breaths and then explain in a normal tone why you are upset
Happy:	Smile and compliment those around you	Rub your good news in your friends face
Sad:	Cry, have alone time, or take a break for space	Refuse to talk to anyone and withdraw yourself
Confused:	Interrupt the teacher and demand instant help	Raise your hand to ask a question
Tired:	Take a 3 minute movement break to help you wake up	Lay your head down and fall asleep in class

**Mindful Minute:** Imagine you are an airplane. Slowly breathe in and out as you imagine everything you see in the sky and on the ground below.

## Mindfulness Mindful Strategies Mindful Activities

### SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

#### WHEN ARE THESE USEFUL?

1. At the beginning of class to help students focus and get ready for learning
2. During class on days where students are having trouble staying on task/highly distracted
3. When students finish assignments in class early and need additional activities to fill the time

**Visualization**  
Enhances core cognitive skills to support academic and social functioning  
Decreases levels of depression, anxiety, pain, psychological stress, and substance abuse  
Gives the opportunity to observe thoughts without reacting to them as facts to better prepare for future challenges

**Breath Techniques**  
Mindful breathing serves to regulate the body and the mind, creating a calm feeling by focusing on the pattern of breathing. This can be repeated for as many times as necessary.

**Example**  
“Imagine you are on the beach. Think about the things you can see, hear, taste, smell and touch.”  
“Imagine you are in your favorite place. What does it look like?”  
“Breathe in to the count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4.”  
“Place your hand on your belly, feel it expand as you breathe in, holding the air inside, and then feel your belly go down as you let the air out.”

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>About BHA. (2023). Benton Hall Academy. [https://www.bentonhallacademy.org/about\\_us](https://www.bentonhallacademy.org/about_us)  
<sup>2</sup>American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(Suppl. 2), 7412A0100. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001>

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