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Happiness Advantage: The Impact on School Culture

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Happiness Advantage: The Impact on School Culture

Jillian Sagan

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

Of the requirements of

Doctoral Education in Educational Leadership

National College of Education

National Louis University

December, 2019

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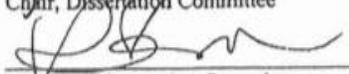
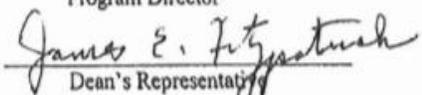
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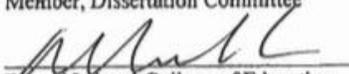
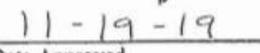
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this evaluation is to analyze the implementation of the Happiness Advantage principles (Achor, 2011) to address the mental well-being for all school district employees. In addition to Happiness Advantage Training (Achor, 2011), the study seeks to determine if the implementation of positive psychology principles affects school culture, teacher engagement and student achievement. The program design incorporates whole district training, ongoing professional development for employees and the autonomy to generate new ideas to sustain a positive mindset for individual schools sites and classrooms. The findings indicate that when positive psychology principles are implemented across a school district, teacher satisfaction and engagement in their work improves.

PREFACE

I have spent my entire career working in District XF. I began as a paraprofessional, became a special education teacher, then assistant principal and I am currently working as a principal. I have spent the past seven years as a building principal and have had the opportunity to lead in both a junior high and elementary setting. As a building principal, my role allows me to create a vision and action plan for our building aligned to instruction, the success of the whole child both social emotionally and academically and the culture of the building. To achieve these goals, we need to work collaboratively with all stakeholders but primarily our students, staff and parents. During my time as a principal in two different schools, I have been able to witness the impact a positive school culture has on the success of both the students and the staff both academically and social emotionally. These two experiences have increased my passion and interest in developing a systematic implementation of positive psychology practices within a school district to determine how it impacts teacher satisfaction and engagement.

My personal experiences building a positive school culture while having high expectations for student and staff success brought me to researching the universal implementation positive psychology practices across an entire district. In modern society, mental health awareness and prevention is imperative due to the growing numbers of children and adults with mental health disorders. When a school focuses on improving school culture and the positive mindset of its staff, I have witnessed three important improvements: 1) productivity and work satisfaction increases 2) teacher/teacher relationships deepen, and 3) teacher/student relationships improve. The purpose of this program evaluation is to advocate for all school districts implementing positive psychology practices with their staff to improve relationships, work satisfaction and eventually student achievement. The goal is to provide districts with a

comprehensive implementation plan for their school sites to improve school culture. This paper advocates that school districts must recognize the need to support the mental well-being of all employees and implement specific positive psychology practices to create more positive work environments for staff and students.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Within the Chicagoland area, a western suburb roughly 25 miles from the city of Chicago, is a large suburban school district with a high percentage of minority students. Currently 20% of this district's student population qualifies for the Free and Reduced Lunch program and 14% speak only limited English. This district contains 28 schools comprising of one Early Learning Center, 21 elementary schools, five junior highs, and one Kindergarten through eighth grade building serving over 15,000 students across five local towns. The district employs roughly 2,000 staff members ranging from operations and maintenance to instructional assistants and district coaches. The demographics of each school varies tremendously due to local subdivisions, townhome/apartment complexes and the increasing homeless population. This district has been recognized as one of the top 50 highest performing school districts in the state of Illinois despite the changing student population. Even with this recognition, the district observes quite a range in terms of school performance on academic testing.

As mentioned, there is significant variance in how schools perform on standardized testing in District XF. In 2015, the district's overall proficiency on the state assessment Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) was 64% for the English Language Arts (ELA) test and 60% for the Mathematics test. The district has been at or above the 90th percentile on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and/or PARCC testing since 2015. As measured by the 2016 spring Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test, 86% of the students in this district were

proficient on the English Language Arts (ELA) MAP test and 88% were proficient on the Mathematics MAP test.

I have been principal at two District XF schools; my first school was McHenry South and my current school is Broadview Elementary. These two schools, although within the same district, perform vastly different on state and culture assessments. In my previous school, McHenry South, with a highly diverse population, the tests scores for the spring MAP test were 76% proficiency on ELA MAP test and 80% proficiency rate on Mathematics MAP test. My current school, Broadview, had 60% of our students' proficient on the ELA test and 62% of students' proficient on the mathematics test. The schools utilize the same district curriculum and follow the same instructional minute allocation, yet they produce significantly different academic achievement results.

The district also monitors its overall culture through the HUMANeX Ventures Cultural Assessment Index, as well as the 5 Essentials survey which is utilized across the state. The HUMANeX survey monitors individual schools' culture by rating their level of engagement and satisfaction twice a year. Only District XF staff complete the HUMANeX survey and rate their personal level of satisfaction and engagement level for the specific school they work in. The 5 Essentials survey evaluates a school's organization based on leaders, teachers, instruction, parent involvement and the overall school environment. In the spring of 2015-2016, Broadview Elementary School had an overall rating which indicated that 69% of the staff was highly engaged and highly satisfied with their job both in the individual school and as a part of the district. In the fall of 2016-2017, the percentage of highly satisfied and highly engaged staff dropped to 67%. However, McHenry South had a 98% satisfaction and engaged rating in the spring

of 2015-2016 and 95% satisfaction and engagement in the fall of 2016-2017 school year. The test results of that school surpassed the district academic proficiency rates for both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math for both PARCC and MAP. Thus in this district, one can experience a range of academic performance and culture satisfaction across all schools.

I began working in this district as an instructional assistant in 2004. I spent one year in that role and then became a special education teacher for the next six years. I joined the administrative team in 2011 as an assistant principal in one of our five junior highs. In 2013, I took over as principal in the same school. I moved on to become the principal in one of our elementary schools in 2016. I have had the opportunity to be on numerous curricular task forces as well as a Student Growth Committee alongside our union representatives to bring the student growth component into the Teacher Appraisal document in 2016.

To address the varying levels of job satisfaction as measured on the HUMANeX survey and focus on the health and well-being of the District XF employees, the superintendent recognized the need to create a work environment that incorporated social emotional learning for all district employees. He made this one of the district initiatives for the 2017-2018 school year. After reading the work of Shawn Achor in *The Happiness Advantage*, the superintendent with our district cabinet members began to research a way to integrate the key principles of book into the workplace. Throughout the researching process, they learned of the partnership between Achor and the International Thought Leader Network (ITLN). The ITLN organization provided an opportunity, in the form of a day long workshop, to train employees on the different positive psychology strategies

for personal and mental growth and happiness. The workshop was named the Orange Frog workshop based on the parable that Achor wrote, *The Orange Frog Parable*, which highlights the key concepts of *The Happiness Advantage* (2011) in the form of a fictional short story. The strategic plan of the superintendent was to have all 2,000 district employees trained in the Orange Frog workshop and then create employee teams back in the schools to continue the strategies and systems they learned during the training in each school. It was a district directive from the superintendent, to the school administrators, and to the staff that we would be focusing on social emotional health and learning for the staff beginning in the 2017-2018 school year.

In the initial stages of this partnership, the superintendent enlisted the help of seven district employee's work with ITLN to become certified workshop trainers. This was done to utilize in-house trainers that were district employees to facilitate the Orange Frog training to the entire district as well as in subsequent years for new employees that have been hired instead of continuing to contract ITLN trainers each year. I am currently involved on our district Happiness Advantage Administrative Team and have been trained by the ITLN as one of seven district trainers in the Orange Frog Workshop. This workshop focuses on the three core ideas from Achor's book, *The Happiness Advantage*, that impact one's overall happiness: Happiness is a Choice, Embracing Positive Outliers, and Creating Space for Positive Emotions. The training provides participants five tactics that Achor's research has proven to result in a person becoming more productive, engaged, and happier in their daily life if they engage in at least one of the five tactics for 21 days straight. All district employees participated in the Orange Frog Workshop throughout the 2017-2018 school year as the initial action step to begin the strategic plan

set forth by the district leaders to focus on social emotional learning for the employees in District XF.

Since the implementation of Happiness Training in District XF, the partnership with Achor has continued. He is in continuous communication with our superintendent, has presented to our entire administrative team, and has used data collected through our district surveys in his latest book, *Big Potential*, which was released in 2018.

Purpose

Many sources are utilized to analyze the success of students, staff, and districts from year to year. States use data from normed assessments such as MAP, state assessments such as PARCC, district surveys similar to the HUMANeX profile as well as the 5 Essentials survey taken by students, staff and parents. The scores traditionally vary from school to school within a district and from district to district across the state. When districts and building leaders invest time and energy into focusing on positive psychology, will this impact how teachers engage with colleagues, students and parents and will it directly impact a school's culture and academic success? The program that I evaluated is the implementation of the Happiness Advantage (Achor, 2011) in the district as a whole. Achor defines it as having the ability to find happiness, meaning and grit in all our experiences and interacts. Happiness is one's ability to recognize that what they do and say matters in the world and that this understanding will allow us to find greater meaning in the work that we do both personally and professionally. To increase our happiness and optimism there are seven core principles of *The Happiness Advantage* (Achor, 2011). These principles provide research and strategies for people to implement into their lives to make space each day to become more positive. Research demonstrates

that fostering a more positive mindset results in greater productivity and to people becoming more fully engaged in their daily lives (Achor, 2011). I was interested in learning more about implementing and putting a more direct focus on staff and student happiness as a result of utilizing this program to determine, if the culture and academic success of the district would increase?

Rationale

Shawn Achor's (2011) research on the seven principles that fuel success and performance at work that are illustrated in his book, *The Happiness Advantage*, have proven to help maximize employees' energy, productivity and performance at work. Achor's research is centered around positive psychology and the idea that the brain functions significantly better in a positive state rather than when negative, neutral or stressed. His research on positive psychology found that a positive mindset increases productivity by 31 percent, making us ten times more engaged at work, allowing us to live longer, receive better grades and much more (Achor, 2011). In an article by Adams, a Gallup survey reported that 13% of employees were engaged at work while 63% were unhappy in their workplace and 24% of employees hated their jobs. The employees that hated their jobs not only impacted their own work productivity but were actively undermining the work of their colleagues that were happy and engaged. They do this through workplace gossip, resistance to change and their overall levels of productivity. Gallup found that this was not only impacting the workplace culture but it was impacting company's financial success (2013). Although schools are non-profit organizations, unhappy and even actively unhappy and disengaged people are present in schools and they are impacting the success of their colleagues and more importantly the education of

the students. The research on positive psychology impacts people both personally and professionally. It is important to see how the implementation of these practices changes the mindset of the unhappy and actively disengaged employees in a school district. From the work of Achor and the ITLN, we have been able to observe the impact that positive psychology has on adults in the workplace, and it will be powerful to see the potential it has to impact students' success each year in school.

It is extremely important to monitor my school culture as it impacts the teachers, students and community. The workload of students and teachers is forever increasing and finding time to support, celebrate and unwind together is extremely important. The systems and supports school administrators put in place need to be transferable to the classroom to create a true impact on the building's culture. According to Hatch, (2013), "thus, schools where staff have developed good working relationships, share a common understanding of what they're doing and why and who trust one another have more opportunities to share expertise and information are more likely to be effective with their students" (p. 35). Hatch believes that it is crucial to invest time in human capital while also focusing on the daily demands of the job and the core instruction. When this is seamlessly implemented, how does it impact the overall culture in a positive way? It is important to be able to recognize if a positive state of mind impacts engagement level and academic achievement.

Goals

The objective of this program evaluation is to determine if school culture will improve if a school district implements positive psychology practices to focus on the social emotional development of adults. Through the practices of *The Happiness*

Advantage (2011) a school district can emphasize the importance of a positive state of mind to fostering a greater sense of satisfaction and engagement, and thus observe increased engagement and student growth by the end of an academic school year. Subsequently, general education students and struggling students will be more successful academically if their school and teachers embed the principles of *The Happiness Advantage* (2011) into their daily lives both at work and at home. Achor and the organization that he partners with, the International Thought Leader Network (ITLN), maintains that the Happiness Training is only the beginning for adults. They believe that with the information and knowledge acquired through the training, with effort and time, positive changes will occur. Achor (2011) states that it takes 21 days to form a habit specific to retraining your brain to be in a more positive state. However, this is simply the beginning and it takes a lifetime to maintain these practices.

Do schools perform better when all involved are in a positive state of mind rather than a negative, neutral, or stressed state? It is important to determine if emphasizing the positive state of students' and staff's minds impacts student achievement. An increased awareness of positive psychology will positively impact the results of our HUMANeX survey and 5 Essentials survey within my own district.

Research Questions

Based on the goals stated above, this study aims to address the following research questions:

Primary Questions:

- How does implementing the principles of the Happiness Advantage impact teacher engagement?
- To what extent does positive school culture as developed through the Happiness Advantage impact student achievement?

- How does positive school culture as developed through the Happiness Advantage impact student engagement?

Secondary questions:

- Does a positive school and classroom culture impact the success of students in a specific school or classroom?
- How does a positive mindset allow both students and staff to be more engaged throughout the school day?
- Do schools perform better when they are in a positive state of mind?

Currently, mental health awareness and prevention is on the rise for both children and the adult population. This greater awareness across all settings, both personal and professional, provides adults with practical applications to deal with day to day stressors. Teachers are responsible for monitoring not only students' academic and social emotional progress but also the planning and preparation of multiple lessons a day, conferencing with parents and handling the daily needs of students. Due to these daily stressors, teachers can experience burnout and have lower levels of job satisfaction or even leave the profession. Low energy and low motivation accompany increased levels of burnout. According to a study conducted in 2008, "exhausted participants' performance results decreased as they reacted more slowly and produced a smaller number of correct responses (Bakker, Van Emmerik, Van Reit, 2008 p.311). When teachers are in the stages of burnout their ability to complete the job responsibilities accurately can decrease. Therefore, teachers need strategies to combat the increasing workload that is expected of them on a daily basis. One method would be incorporating positive psychology principles into the workplace to see the impact they have on overall mindset and workplace culture.

Research has been conducted in this field specific to students and staff in an educational setting.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The emotional wellbeing of both students and staff in District XF has always been a significant priority. As noted by Seligman, “nearly 20% of youth experience an episode of clinical depression by the end of high school” (2009, p. 293). Due to this alarming percentage, school districts need to embed social emotional learning and supports in place for all students and staff to provide them strategies and supports to respond and deal with emotions. The statement, living vicariously through someone else, is true for both positive and negative experiences. Teachers can experience vicarious trauma as a result of the trauma in which they are exposed to from their students. According to Minero and the work of the American Counseling Association (2017), teachers’ brains can be affected by the stress or trauma their students experience. Symptoms such as fear, adrenaline, higher blood pressure, accelerated heart rate and extreme emotions can be elicited in their brains without even experiencing the trauma first hand. To combat the stress and trauma students come to school with, there are programs and curriculum available to districts to support social emotional learning like MindUp, Character Counts and Second Step. District XF, along with a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum, has embedded positive psychology into their core practices. A focus for implementing SEL curriculum is that our students not only improve their emotional well-being but they also improve their academic success. Ramachandram noted that when focusing on student’s well-being in schools increased their achievement levels on standardized testing which allowed us to see that “happier students are higher achievers,” (2016 p.7). In the

2017-2018 school year, District XF included the social emotional well-being of their students in the district's strategic plan. The goal states:

Strategic Focus Area 1: Supporting Whole Child Academic and Social-Emotional Success

Priority Action Steps

- Design high quality instructional lessons that engage, support and challenge all students.
- Implement a Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum that ensures all students are healthy, safe, engaged and supported.
- Engage staff and community in partnership opportunities focused on supporting the academic and social-emotional success of our students.

The strategic focus area emphasizes the commitment of the district to make social emotional health a priority for all. In a study conducted by Ramachandram (2016), it was found that schools need to put an emphasis on positive education within their curriculum that focuses on the whole child. In District XF, the focus is not only on the academic progress of a child but the social-emotional well-being of all students and staff.

In this chapter, I review the research around positive psychology principles and how they impact teacher performance and school culture. First, I examine what positive psychology is and how it can impact individuals' personal and professional lives. Second, I examine the implementation of positive psychology principles through interventions in the work environments and the impact it has on teacher engagement and work satisfaction. Finally, I examine the impact a positive school culture has on teacher engagement and student achievement. Throughout my review, I present the importance of implementing positive psychology principles in schools as a means to improve both teacher and student performance.

Positive Psychology and Definitions

It is important to have a foundational knowledge of positive psychology and how it can impact individuals' well-being. Positive psychology places emphasis on the thoughts and feelings of humans and how they impact our behaviors (Peterson, 2008). This includes the ability to enrich positive qualities as opposed to one's weaknesses. Positive psychology focuses on positive events and influences, including positive experiences such as happiness, joy, inspiration and love and positive states of mind such as gratitude, resilience, and compassion. This can also be viewed as identifying the good in people's choices, judgements and value systems (Diener, 2003). Positive psychology is centered on increasing gratefulness, resiliency, engagement and optimism. When people are more grateful a correlation was found related to increased levels of empathy, forgiveness, helpfulness and emotional support (Howells, 2007).

Shawn Achor (2011) conducted a "meta-analysis of happiness research that brought together the results of over 200 scientific studies on nearly 275,000 people and found that happiness leads to success in nearly every domain of our lives, including marriage, health, friendship, community involvement, creativity and in particular our jobs, careers, and businesses" (p. 41). Achor (2011) found that, "when we are happy, when our mindset and mood are positive, we are smarter, more motivated, and thus more successful" (p. 37).

History of Positive Psychology

Psychologists and psychiatrists have been treating mental illnesses for centuries. The work around positive psychology began to gain momentum in 1984 with the work of Ed Diener centered on well-being and satisfaction. Other researchers such as

Lyubomirsky and Seligman along with the consulting company Gallup, began to research how positive emotions for individuals can increase longevity and change behaviors.

Their work was brought to our armed forces, businesses and schools. Positive psychology linked to building one's capacity for resiliency, engagement, positivity began before World War II to address the concerns not only of soldiers, but also of civilians. Around 1940, specific to the work with veterans, psychologists wanted to treat patients in a way that focused on positive qualities rather than deficit areas (Clonan, 2004).

“Such a deficit-oriented focus leads to treatment services that are primarily reactive and limited in scope (i.e. help only the disordered), and also delays the provision of services until a diagnosable disorder is manifest- thereby missing a critical window wherein more positive services that are potentially more efficient (e.g., shorter duration) and effective could be offered” (Clonan, 2004, p. 102).

This shift in services allowed psychologists to move from a deficit service model to one that is proactive and could benefit not just the ill but could also be used as preventative measures. This model found its way into the schools around the 1970s to be able to focus on at risk students and address problems that arose during the school day (Clonan, 2004). This model is continued today with most schools having either full or part-time social workers and psychologists that service both identified IEP or 504 students as well as the general education students.

Positive Psychology Interventions

Happiness Advantage

The principle of Happiness Advantage is to connect happiness, grit and meaning to positively increase your ability to have long term optimism. Achor (2011) outlines seven principles that allow your brain to begin to rewire into a more positive state of mind. These seven principles are The Happiness Advantage, Fulcrum and Lever, Tetris

Effect, Falling Up, Zorro Circles, 20-Second Rule, Social Investment. The Happiness Advantage principle allows one to learn strategies to retrain the brain to be in a more positive state of mind while Fulcrum and Lever allows one to adjust one's mindset depending on the situation we are in to feel a greater sense of success and achievement. The Tetris Effect principle helps one to scan the world for more positives instead of always seeing the negative in experiences we have. Falling Up is grounded in knowing that as humans we will experience negativity and failure in our lives but is important to understand how we utilize the other principles in order to recover from these situations quicker and remain positive despite the negativity. Setting small attainable goals that one can achieve quicker within a larger goal is the Zorro Circle principle. This process allows our brains to recognize a celebration sooner, which will help sustain us on our path to achieve the overall goal. The 20 Second Rule is a strategy where we pre plan for a task or goal and make small adjustments that will help us achieve this goal. For example, if we wanted to save more money, we could delete all our credit card information from our phone to add an extra step in the process of purchasing items online. This extra step would hopefully overtime help us to save more money. The last principle, which is social investment is grounded in surrounding ourselves with people that boost our self-esteem, support our goals and push us to be the best versions of ourselves (Achor, 2011). When living our lives by these seven principles we are more likely to not only achieve more goals that we set for ourselves but also live in a more positive, productive state of mind.

Achor's research states that when one embeds these seven principles into your daily lifestyle your overall happiness will improve (2011). This is similar to the findings of Carol Dweck (2007), in that "everyone can change and grow through application and

experience” (p. 7). If we provide the tools necessary through positive psychology principles, our teachers and students’ mindsets can adapt into a more positive state. There are proven ways that individuals can change their mindset to be in a more positive state, including meditation, exercise, conscious acts of kindness, journaling and identifying gratitude (Achor, 2011). Lyubomirsky (2007) found that participating in acts of kindness provided positive benefits to both the giver and the receiver of the kindness. When individuals participate in one or more of these activities on a daily basis, they can drastically improve their resiliency, engagement and optimism.

Outlined in the work conducted by Shawn Achor in conjunction with an organization called International Thought Leader Network (ITLN), they have created an Orange Frog workshop that provides businesses, schools and organizations positive psychology tools to reframe personal mindsets. The ITLN, Orange Frog Workshop, focuses on three core ideas (Achor 2011):

- 1) Positive outliers must be embraced
- 2) Happiness is a choice
- 3) Create space for positive emotions

A positive outlier is a person whom one might call extremely happy. They are seen and known to be constantly in a state of positivity and growth. The ITLN training encourages individuals to embrace and support these people in order to enhance the positive of themselves and others around them. This is similar to one of the seven survival skills outlined by Tony Wagner (2008). Students need to be able to collaborate across networks and lead by influence. Positive outliers are doing just that and leading by influence and impacting the experiences and states of the people around them.

Acknowledging that happiness is a choice is a key component of this positive psychology intervention. Recognizing and understanding that individuals are in control of their own levels of positivity can create the necessary change. This echoes the work of Dweck, who states “the growth mindset says all of these things can be developed. All – you, your partner, and the relationship – are capable of growth and change” (2007, p.148).

The last core idea of creating space for positive emotions, is allowing time each day to focus on reframing one’s mindset. Change does not happen without work. Studies have found that it takes 21 days to create a habit (Achor, 2011). Achor (2011) also states that, “habits form because our brain actually changes in response to frequent practice” (p. 149). In a study conducted by Rockey (2015), students in an honors college course participated in a 21 Day Challenge. Students selected one tactic: meditation, exercise, acts of kindness, journaling or gratitude and practiced that one tactic for 21 days in a row. These five tactics were found to be the simplest ways to begin to retrain the brain to be in a more positive state of mind. Meditation calms the brain and allows it to focus on slowing down the thoughts while exercise increases endorphins that allow the brains to be more positive. Performing daily conscious acts of kindness is a way for individuals to actively seek out ways to be kind to another person and journaling can provide brains the opportunity to relive a positive experience they previously had. The most commonly known tactic is focusing on being grateful which allows individuals to focus on the positive that is happening throughout the day. A basic gratitude would be for our family, job or food however the challenge in identifying what individuals are grateful for is to become increasingly more specific. One example to be more specific than family would

be to be grateful for the opportunity to travel to Europe to be able to visit the town that your family is from. All five tactics when performed on a daily basis will begin to retrain the brain to be in a more constant state of positive (Achor, 2011). After completing one of the five tactics for 21 days, “the students were able to see some dramatic changes in their perceptions of life, the college experience and ultimate happiness” (Rockey, 2015, p. 209). When time is allocated each day to focus on happiness, the brain will then increase its level of happiness and positivity after 21 days. Growth can occur from work and effort is possible (Dweck, 2007).

Other Interventions in Schools

The core ideas from the ITLN Orange Frog training are grounded in the foundations of positive psychology and how to retrain one’s mind into one that is in a more positive state (Achor, 2011 and ITLN Network). Other organizations utilized a focus on self- reflection, gratitude and daily or weekly time allocated to social and emotional supports (Chan, 2009; Howells, 2013; Waters and Stokes, 2015). Howells’ (2007) study emphasized teachers practicing gratitude with their classes. It was not simply being grateful but providing opportunities and experiences that allowed students to see the difference between gratitude for and gratitude to. In the study conducted by Chan (2010), teachers voluntarily participated, “in an eight-week self-improvement project to enhance their self-awareness through self-reflection” (p.142). The teachers needed to complete a weekly log that highlighted three things they were grateful for that week. In Chan’s study (2010), the results found that, “the more grateful the person, the more likely the person would value the meaning of life and experience the sense of accomplishment, and the less likely the person would feel emotionally drained and

depersonalized” (p. 145). Practicing daily gratitude for specific aspects of one’s life or in general each day can improve the overall satisfaction felt on a day to day basis.

The research around positive psychology interventions at the business, school and organizational level is relatively new but each study has demonstrated an improvement in the emotional state of participants. In an article by Royal, a Gallup survey reported that only 33% of United States employees are “engaged” in the work they are doing and worldwide, only 15% of employees (2019). With over 157 million people that work in the United States, are we satisfied with only 33% of them feeling engaged in the workplace? Gallup found that about 70% of a team’s engagement levels depended on their supervisors. These supervisors set the tone with the workplace conditions and the relationships that are formed (Royal, 2019). In a study by Cohn and Fredrickson (2009), people participated in an eight week practice of daily meditation focused on love and kindness. “After eight weeks, mediators showed an increase in a number of personal resources, including physical wellness, agency for achieving important goals, ability to savor positive experiences, and quality of close relationships” (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009, p. 18). It is important for both individuals and supervisors to focus on personal positive growth to develop one’s ability to sustain positive emotions through stressful times in the workplace.

Arguments Against Positive Psychology

School practitioners currently function utilizing a deficit model not a proactive positive psychology model. Just as there is research and studies done on identifying and treating mental illnesses, there are studies that focus on positive psychology. Both can coexist as long as attention is put forth in both areas. An argument against positive

psychology, which can be interpreted as, not seeing the problems in the world, is that we have other resources and options in the 21st century and we should strive to find other strategies and practices to address the social-emotional needs in our society other positive psychology practices (Diener, 2003). To focus on the positive is not to say that negativity and evil do not exist, it is to be able to have strategies and skills to recover from those hardships quicker. Therefore, positive psychology principles train our brains to be more resilient in more difficult or challenging times.

Many social workers and psychologists, despite their awareness of positive psychology practices to aid in prevention, still feel that the school system is using a deficit service model. The deficit service model is based on addressing a problem with the necessary interventions such as counseling, coping strategies or, medication only after a problem behavior has been identified. It is a system that is reactive to students or adults rather than preventative. In this system, a problem behavior first needs to appear, be identified, assessed, and labeled and only then supports are put in place to mediate the original problem. According to a survey of school psychologists, it was found that, “time spent with deficit-oriented special education activities is now closer to 80%, representing a 26% increase over the survey conducted the previous decade” (Clonan, 2004, p. 102). Schools are increasing the use of the deficit model as the years progress.

School psychologists have utilized the results from different forms of standardized assessments such as the Weschler, Vineland, WRAT-R and the Peabody to identify students’ needs and to plan for the appropriate intervention plan. When these assessments are completed and a deficit area is identified, these children are now identified requiring special education. It was found that school psychologists spend 50-

75% of their time administering and identifying students with these problems. The remaining time is spent providing interventions to address the areas of need (Reschly & Wilson, 1996). This time could be spent on proactive measures instead.

There is a desire from school personnel to focus more on the positive interventions and the ability to be proactive in their service delivery because schools have been focused on the reactionary model of finding and identifying the problems. Utilizing a deficit model where practitioners spend most of their time assessing students leaves little time to be preventive in our practices. Positive psychology practices provide strategies to help individuals remain in a positive state of mind and recover from negativity and hardships quicker to minimize the need to be reactive. Positive psychology principles can provide students with the tools to be able to recover from serious situations and provide skills to prevent them from occurring.

Impact on Individuals

In several studies, it has been found that implementing positive psychology practices in the schools has increased the positive mindset of both the teachers and students (Chan, 2010; Howells, 2014; Rockey, 2015; Roth, 2017; Royer and Moreau, 2016). When schools focused on providing support to both students and parents through positive psychology interventions they observed an overall positive affect (Roth, 2017).

In a study completed by Roth (2017), junior high students were selected to participate in a ten week intervention class led by either doctoral students in school psychology or a psychology professor. During their weekly meetings they focused on gratitude, optimism, acts of kindness, goal setting, and savoring positive experiences. Specific activities were planned for each session and homework to follow up on the

sessions was assigned. The parents of the participants were provided parent information meetings as well as weekly emails to provide more information on the skills covered with their children each week. A life satisfaction survey was administered prior to and after the intervention course. Although there were not any statistically significant changes on the survey, there was positive feedback received from the students in their follow up sessions five and seven weeks after the intervention course had been completed. It was also reported that many of the students that participated in the study maintained any positive effects they made for at least two months after the intervention (Roth, 2017). There are many variations on positive psychology interventions, but each one has shown an overall improvement in the mindset of those who engaged in positive psychology.

Positive psychology interventions varied in the studies but many of them focused on a form of self- reflection, gratitude and daily or weekly time allocated to social emotional supports (Chan, 2010; Howells, 2013; Waters and Stokes, 2015). It was found that when positive psychology principles were in place in an educational setting, the well-being of the staff and students improved positively impacting the levels of fulfillment and engagement (Seligman, 2009). In a study done by Seligman (2009), “There is substantial evidence from well controlled studies that skills increase resilience, positive emotion, engagement and meaning can be taught to school children” (p.293). Those attributes are what Peterson outlined as positive states. If interventions can teach children to be more positive, interventions can help support teachers’ positive emotional state as well. The research around positive psychology with teachers and students is new, but it has demonstrated success with both the overall mindset of both groups. Embedding positive psychology principles into the workplace can lead to higher levels of success and

engagement and in an educational setting the teachers and staff will be more engaged in the work they do for students.

It is important for employees to be satisfied and engaged in their daily work to be as productive as possible. Does implementing positive psychology practices impact teacher engagement and workplace satisfaction? Teachers shape the minds of young learners. Cherkowski (2018) stated, “teaching is considered to be one of the most stressful occupations, contributing to teachers’ real experiences of lack of engagement, poor performance, job dissatisfaction, high rates of turnover, and job burnout” (p. 65). To continue to recruit and retain high quality teachers, especially when there is such high turnover and burnout, a focus on mental health and positive mindset is essential. Studies have found that focusing on the overall happiness of employees impacts the overall culture in the workplace (Achor, 2011; Chan, 2010; Cherkowski, 2018; Coyle, 2018; Heath and Heath, 2017). When organizations invest in the people through the components of positive psychology, the overall workplace environment can flourish.

Many young teachers who are new to the profession, leave the teaching profession because of a discouraging work environment (Kutsyruba & Walker, 2017). A study from Sirisunhirun and Dhirathiti (2015) found that there was a correlation between a happy employee and the overall happiness and organizational engagement level at work. Positive experiences such as gratitude, acts of kindness, acknowledgments and social connections were all found to increase the success rates for both the employee and the company (Achor, 2011; Cherkowski, 2018; Coyle, 2018). “A meta-analysis of sixty-five organizations found that those that celebrated strengths and successes annual increase in productivity estimated to be worth more than \$1,000 per employee” (Achor,

2018, p. 205). Based on this research, it is mutually beneficial for both the employee and employer to invest time into improving their mindset and workplace environment for higher profit margins as well as employee retention. In the case of the schools, the benefits would be student achievement and teacher retention.

A Finnish study found that support from a supervisor, appreciation from colleagues, a focus on innovation, and a positive workplace climate were all important aspects in a school that allowed the teachers to handle the demands of their students (Bakker, 2008). Howells (2014) supports these findings because staff that participated in daily gratitude were found to be more encouraging of their colleagues and more expressive in their appreciation for each other. Positive social interactions at work improved physical health of employees. “Each positive interaction employees have during the course of the work day actually helps return the cardiovascular system back to resting levels... employees with more of these interactions become protected from the negative effects of job strain” (Achor, 2011, p.178). These social connections between colleagues increase the feeling of safety in the workplace, which in turn also helps increase their sense of belonging and productivity at work (Coyle, 2018).

When individuals themselves are in a more positive state of mind, it ripples out to the people that they encounter. For teachers, this would be students, colleagues, parents, and community members. Howells (2014) found that teachers that participated in practicing gratitude each day with their students show an improvement in themselves, the learning environment and with their students. The teachers had an increased level of positivity that improved their connections with the greater school community as well as an improvement on how each class functioned as a whole. This led to a more relaxed

state of mind with “greater degrees of personal satisfaction and greater resilience” (Howells, 2014, p.65). Chan (2010) concluded that, “a teacher’s dispositional gratitude not only is associated with greater life satisfaction but could act as a protective factor against teacher burnout” (p.150). The research demonstrates that implementing systems for positive psychology principles in an educational setting improves teacher performance, the learning environment for the students and teacher retention.

Teacher Engagement

A positive school culture is at the foundation of all successful schools. Knowing this, does a positive school culture have an impact on teacher engagement and overall student achievement? Without a sense of safety, belonging, clear purpose, and fun, learning will not occur. All stakeholders within a school have a direct impact on the culture from the students and staff to the administrators and parents. Habegger (2007) notes that to create a positive school culture, focus areas must be clear for all stakeholders. For the students, the focus should be on strong relationships, while the teacher should emphasize encouragement, professionalism, and collaboration, and for the parents it was voice and relationships. While working on relationships, encouragement, and collaboration, schools need to simultaneously ensure there is also a clear purpose for the instructional practices and academic focus areas for the building (Habegger, 2007). Having a clear purpose based on positive psychology and the social-emotional well-being of one’s staff and students will ultimately improve a school culture.

Studies have found that the more staff and students participated in positive psychology interventions the greater life satisfaction they felt, the more connected they felt to their colleagues and students, and the more engaged they felt in their job (Chan,

2010; Howells, 2014). Howells (2014) found that teachers that participated in the interventions not only felt that their relationships improved with their students, but they also began to encourage and express gratitude to their peers more often, worked more collaboratively with one another, and were more supportive of each other (Howells, 2014, p. 65). In both studies, teachers were more engaged and productive in their schools.

Happier people receive more job interviews, earn higher incomes, receive better evaluations, higher levels of job satisfaction, are more productive and have a lower burnout rate (Lyubomirsky, 2005). As seen from previous studies and the foundational understanding of positive psychology, people that make a conscious effort to make happiness a choice will ultimately have better outcomes at work. Achor (2011) found that happier people achieved 56% greater sales, were 40% more likely to receive a promotion and were 30% more productive at work.

Student Achievement

The research has not yet established a correlation between positive psychology interventions and school academic achievement, but it has found a correlation between productivity, engagement, and stronger teacher-student relationships. Cherkowski (2018), found that the more joy, laughter, and fun that employees had at work, the more likely they were willing to take risks within the classroom. When teachers take risks and provide learning opportunities for students that are different than the usual lessons, an increase in engagement can be seen by the students. If one knows that through positive psychology interventions, the strength of the student-teacher relationship improves, one should be able to predict that student achievement will also increase.

Conclusion

Most of the work around positive psychology and positive psychology interventions is relatively new. Implementing positive psychology interventions with the staff and students will improve relationships, engagement levels and individuals' holistic well-being. This in turn will improve both student and school performance both behaviorally and academically. The happier a person is, the more willing they are to engage in the work of learning.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

I utilized a mixed methods approach to collecting my data. In this regard, “evaluators need to know and use a variety of methods in order to be responsive to the nuances of particular evaluation questions and the idiosyncrasies of specific stakeholders needs” (Patton, 2008, p. 422). This included determining the level of satisfaction of the people in the district through a quantitative measure and digging deeper into individual staff members' thoughts during a focus group to find out how the implementation of the Happiness Advantage (2011) impacted both their engagement and productivity at work.

During the 2017-2018 school year, my district began the implementation of the Happiness Advantage program (Achor 2011). The goal of this program was to determine if schools and teachers recognize the importance of positive psychology as implemented through the Happiness Advantage program and have a more positive state of mind and higher levels of work satisfaction and engagement. I evaluated the effectiveness and

importance of implementing this program across the entire district. Patton (2008) states that the purpose of a program evaluation is to, “provide ongoing feedback for improvements during implementation” (p.32). My purpose was two-fold: to make formative improvements to our implementation and learning, and to gain knowledge to demonstrate that that implementing components of positive psychology into the schools can greatly increase the overall school culture (Patton, 2008).

The district utilized the timeline for the preparation and implementation of the Happiness Advantage during the 2017-2018 school year.

Table 1: Implementation Timeline

Dates	Action Steps
Fall 2016	District cabinet members researched and identified the appropriate strategies/program to foster a positive mindset Partner with International Thought Leader Network (ITLN) to utilize their Orange Frog Workshop for all district staff (fall of 2016)
September 2016	Train all administrators in the principles of positive psychology through the Orange Frog training
May 2017	Train seven staff members to be facilitate the Orange Frog training for the entire district Administer the HUMANeX and District Happiness surveys to monitor overall work satisfaction and engagement
August-October 2017	Train all staff in the principles of positive psychology through the Orange Frog Training
September 2017	Administer the HUMANeX survey in the fall to monitor overall work satisfaction and engagement
October 2017	Cabinet will meet with each administrator to generate school action plan to sustain and deepen the principles at each site (October 2017)

	<p>Each school forms a Happiness Committee to train and implement each principle in each school</p> <p>All principles are taught to each building over the course of the school year</p>
January 2018	Members of the Happiness Committees participate in a refresher training mid-year
May 2018	Administer the HUMANeX and District Happiness surveys to monitor overall work satisfaction and engagement
Ongoing	<p>Activities, lessons and artifacts are shared amongst all district administrators to utilize in their buildings through Google Drive</p> <p>Highlight activities that teachers have utilized with the students through staff memos, social media and the School Leadership Teams monthly</p> <p>Share activities with parent community through newsletters and social media weekly</p> <p>Provide monthly opportunities during staff development to reflect and articulate with colleagues strategies that have been effective with students</p> <p>Opportunities for reflection at each of the sites to monitor school culture for individual buildings</p>

This was the first year of implementation of the Happiness Training program within the district, and the ensuing results were shared with the district for the upcoming school years in the hopes of full implementation. The district made an investment in providing training for the entire staff with the implementation of the Happiness Advantage principles as well as the Orange Frog training (Achor, 2011). Each of the 28 building administrators collaborated with a team of their teachers to create a small

committee that was to lead the more individualized systems that align with each building's needs. They created systems that support the seven principles of the Happiness Advantage to make a concerted effort to improve the totality of school culture (Achor, 2011).

Data Gathering Techniques

Focus Groups

I utilized three different focus groups to collect data on the implementation of the Happiness Advantage in District XF. Two of the focus groups included of teachers, instructional assistants and support staff from two schools and the final focus group included administrative team across the entire district. This provided a range of perspectives from staff across the district as opposed to one single school site. I explained in an email to each of the two schools and administrative team that research is being collected regarding the implementation of the Happiness Advantage (2011). I asked for staff volunteers that would like to share their experiences as part of a focus group. Then, I randomly selected three to six names from the staff who volunteered to participate. I anticipated that this method would allow me to find people that would be open and honest in conversations related to the district focus on happiness.

The buildings that I targeted for the focus groups was one of the schools with the lowest school culture scores and one of the schools that has the highest school culture scores based on the results of the fall of 2017 school year HUMANE X survey. To select the two schools, I reviewed the HUMANE X survey data and was able to see each school's complete culture data prior to the implementation of the Happiness Training

program, as well as their data after the first year of implementation on the survey. The schools that I selected were Sterling Elementary school and Larkin Elementary, both with students in grades kindergarten through sixth grade. The administrative team that was selected consisted of one junior high principal, one junior high assistant principal, three elementary principals and one elementary assistant principal. I met with each focus group in the spring of 2018 after the district had been implementing the Happiness Advantage across all schools for a minimum of six months. Each of the three focus groups lasted from 45-60 minutes in length and were asked a series of eight to ten questions (Appendices D and E).

The focus group data provided information from district employees on how the implementation of the Happiness Advantage program has impacted them personally, professionally, as a school, and in terms of student achievement. They also had the opportunity to share any additional thoughts related to the implementation of the Happiness training and school implementation process.

Surveys

There were two major methods of data collection that I used within this research to collect my data through surveys on the impact of the Happiness Advantage (2011) program on school culture: the HUMANeX survey and a survey created by the district on happiness and focus groups comprised of teachers and administrators. There was an 82% completion rate for the HUMANeX both in fall of 2016 after being sent out to 2,031 District XF employees. There was a 71% completion rate in the fall of 2017 after being sent out to 2,124 District XF employees. The HUMANeX survey is a standardized survey

that measured the percentage of highly engaged and highly satisfied staff and it is measured both in the fall and spring of each school year based on standardized questions related to team, talent, relationships, innovation and engagement. The survey data was able to provide information on the entire district. All district employees take the HUMANeX survey specific to their individual school and the district office. I utilized the HUMANeX survey scores as well as district created surveys specific to happiness, engagement and productivity. I utilized the data on the HUMANeX survey in the fall of 2016 and again in the fall of 2017 to track for the entire district and to monitor the schools' progress. The HUMANeX survey is administered twice a year, in the fall and in the spring, to monitor school culture.

In the spring of 2017, the district asked the staff to participate in a general happiness and productivity survey created by two district assistant superintendents, to provide them a baseline of information from each of the twenty-eight schools. District XF informally monitored the positive psychology implementation with a district created survey that was administered to the entire staff prior to the implementation of positive psychology and then in spring after one year of implementation. There was a 77% completion rate in the spring of 2016 on the happiness survey after it was sent out to 2,031 District XF. In the fall of 2017, there was a 72% completion rate of the happiness survey after it was sent out to 2,124 District XF employees. The survey consisted of 37 questions ranging from achieving work-related goals to their level of optimism in life. The specific themes were related to health, relationships, work satisfaction, emotions, fulfillment and stress. Staff were asked to rank each question on either a scale of 0-10 or 0-5, 0 for the low score and 10 for the high score. The survey included questions related

to achieving goals, relationships, meaningful work, and social emotional well-being. The district provided the staff another opportunity to complete the happiness survey in the fall of 2017 to reflect on throughout the 2017-2018 school year. This data was reviewed by central office cabinet members to monitor the overall happiness and productivity of all District XF staff after the first year of implementation of the Happiness Advantage program (2011). The information collected was then analyzed to determine if general staff happiness and engagement at work increased due to the implementation of the Happiness Advantage. This survey was administered not only to teachers but also to support staff, district office staff, custodians, and administrators. The roles of district employees vary widely and therefore utilizing a district survey allowed for feedback from all parties. I believe that these surveys have provided a diversity of perspectives from across the district.

Ethical Considerations

Each participant of the focus group was provided with an informed consent document that outlined my research and how the information they share would be used. The informed consent process is defined as the “agreement between the concerned parties about the data-gathering process and /or the disclosure, reporting, and/or use of data, information, and/or results from a research experiment in an educational setting” (James, Milenkiewicz, Buckman, 2008, p.18). The consent statement made it clear to the participants that the information collected, as well as their identities will remain confidential, and it will be saved on a password protected network. I also disclosed my involvement in the implementation of the Happiness Advantage program (2011) and assured the participants that any information shared during these interviews will be used

for my research only and will not be shared with central office. This allowed for the participants to feel comfortable to share their true thoughts related to the school culture in the district and how it related to the implementation of the Happiness Training, even if it differs from the district's perspective.

I shared with each of the focus group participants my role in the implementation of the Happiness Advantage (2011) implementation and why I was collecting more information from a select group of district employees. I explained to the focus group that survey data, HUMANE X data, student achievement data and text from the interviews will be utilized to determine to what extent it has impacted school culture and student achievement. Each member of the focus group was provided this information in written form to explain in writing how the data will be utilized and that participation can be ended at anytime. The consent included that their responses remained confidential and secure. The information gathered from the district employees was utilized to make the necessary changes for the district to be able to focus on strategies that improve school culture in a way that meets the needs of all district employees.

Data Analysis Techniques

The qualitative data was collected and analyzed by coding the transcribed text from the focus groups to find consistent themes from the focus group participants. Based on the themes that emerged (i.e. interconnectedness, deeper relationships, increased levels of risk taking), the text was used to explain the rationale behind each theme. The quantitative data collected from the two surveys was analyzed using the mean score of each to observe how the entire district feels based on the positive psychology as it relates to school culture. I also compared the survey results as well as their HUMANE X results

from the district from before implementation and after implementation of the Happiness Advantage program. This allowed me to measure their opinions and feelings about positive psychology and its impact on school culture.

Conclusion

Utilizing mixed methodology allowed me to collect data from district staff both by surveys and follow up focus groups. The data collected allowed for a better understanding of how positive psychology and the Happiness Advantage impacts the overarching culture of a school.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Based on the data, there are many factors that influence a school's culture. Staff morale, school environment, building or district expectations, student behaviors, and others can affect both a teacher's ability to be successful in their instruction and a student's ability to make progress both academically, socially and emotionally. When districts and/or individual schools focus time, energy and money on implementing the principles of positive psychology, will school culture improve? It has been found that brains in a positive state have an advantage over brains that are in a neutral or negative state and that there are strategic ways to train your brain to be in a more constant state of positive (Achor, 2011).

When individuals work to put their brains into a more positive state, it is possible according to the research to achieve higher levels of happiness in multiple areas of our lives. Achor's research provided District XF the rationale to make teacher well-being a priority and it began implementing positive psychology principles in the fall of 2017. That year, District XF was in the first year of implementation of the Happiness

Advantage principles across the entire district. The implementation at the individual schools levels varies depending on the time allocated each month, the quality of activities planned and the staff acceptance. One school in District XF is solely re-teaching the seven principles of Happiness Advantage during their monthly staff development time while another school in addition to the monthly lessons, incorporates monthly staff outings to increase the social network as well as surprises the staff by delivering snacks and drinks once per trimester within their classrooms. When analyzing the implementation of Happiness Advantage principles across District XF, data was collected from two schools and a group of administrators through a focus groups as well as from two district-wide surveys related to culture and levels of job satisfaction.

Findings for Positive Psychology in Schools in District XF- As Is:

Context: Improving School Culture

District XF consists of 28 schools, over 2,000 employees and 15,000 students. The district has a central office Cabinet that is comprised of six assistant superintendents, one associate superintendent and one superintendent. There are 72 administrators that range from assistant principals, principals, directors to Cabinet members. With almost 100 administrators across all settings, the ability for each staff member to receive consistent feedback and coaching can be challenging. The lack of individualized attention can affect a staff member's level of engagement and satisfaction in the workplace. In the fall of 2017, the results of the survey reflected that District XF had 86% of staff highly satisfied and engaged at their workplace. This survey measured an average of 2,000 plus employees made up of teachers, instructional assistants, secretaries, administrators, operations and maintenance and district office employees. In a district this large, there are

not only opportunities for variance at the instructional level but at the building culture level and it can be seen in the survey data that ranges from 56% to 97% highly satisfied and engaged at work depending on the school in which survey participants were employed. Many factors can be attributed to the fluctuation in scores such as: change in administration, new curriculum implementation, grade level changes, increases in programs at school sites, and student behavior to name a few. The desire for continuous improvement for the social-emotional well-being of the employees in District XF, with all the factors that impact staff's ability to work and teach is what brought the Happiness Advantage principles to District XF in the fall of 2017.

Culture: Identifying the Individual Building Uniqueness

Each of the 28 schools in District XF, has their own culture that stems from the school traditions, the staff and the community. These unique differences in culture can be seen in the cultural assessment data from the HUMANeX survey. The individual score HUMANeX scores are shared at each school site with the staff, but they are not shared across buildings or with students and families.

At McHenry South specifically, the HUMANeX score in the fall of 2016 was 98% in the fall of 2016 and 95% highly satisfied in the spring of 2017. During staff development time, at least 30 minutes each week, is allocated for culture building activities. These activities can be competitive, reflective, and humorous, but we have committed to implementing these at least once a month. A few of the activities over the past school year have been a Road Rally scavenger hunt in the community, a Lip Sync battle, a Guess Who staff game, and answering personal questions with a partner or small group. In addition to whole group activities, McHenry staff chose to provide weekly

recognition to individual staff members each week. Each staff member provides positive feedback or positive memories that they encountered with the selected staff. Each submission is written out and presented to the individual staff members at the end of the work week. Activities such as these build the social investment of the entire group as well as foster time for creating positive memories. The culture created at Broadview is unlike the culture across town at McHenry South. Their HUMANeX score in the fall of 2016 was 67% which had decreased from the 69% of highly satisfied and engaged in the spring of 2016. They have traditions and activities throughout the year, but the frequency is different and the staff buy-in is inconsistent. The time allocated for staff development is primarily used for instructional planning with grade level teams and it is uncommon for them to meet as a whole staff. Most staff interact solely with their grade level teams throughout the day. One staff member shared at a School Leadership Meeting in the spring of 2016, that they knew only half of their colleagues' first names. Time had not been allocated to build culture and a sense of school community at this point. This range of differences can be seen across all 28 buildings. The differences in school culture are reflected on the cultural assessment results both in the fall and the spring.

District XF has invested in the importance of building positive school culture across all buildings. District XF partnered with the International Thought Leaders Network (ITLN) to educate and empower each staff member through the happiness principles from Achor's book to increase positivity within each person. Each staff member was given the Orange Frog Parable written by Achor, attended the Orange Frog Workshop hosted by the ITLN network and has been provided a more in depth understanding of the seven principles during staff development each month back at the

individual schools. All District XF employees attended The Orange Frog workshop either prior to the school year starting or in the first three months of school. If a school participated during the school year, full day release substitute teachers were provided for each staff member in the building. If a school participated prior to the school year, they were compensated by the school district at an hourly rate for the 6.5 hours. This structure allowed each staff member to attend the workshop during the beginning of the school year.

After the initial training, each building participated in monthly follow up lessons created by district administrators to go deeper into each of the individual seven principles. These lessons were scheduled during staff development time and could be modified to meet the needs of the individual staff members in each of the 28 buildings. Twice a month, all district administrators met together for general administrative meetings to discuss the current state of the district, assess the implementation of district initiatives and to provide information that will impact the schools in the future. During one of the monthly administrator meetings, all administrators participated in one of the positive psychology lessons to provide foundational understanding and increase the likelihood of consistency when brought back to each building.

Conditions: Providing Adequate Training on Improving School Culture

The conditions of the culture of the entire district have been led by the district cabinet members that consist of six assistant superintendents, one associate superintendent and one superintendent. During their weekly cabinet meetings that last anywhere from one to three hours each week, they met to discuss district initiatives, projects, strengths and areas of concern. At the cabinet level, the district and individual

schools cultures were analyzed using the HUMANeX cultural assessment survey. Even though the district was already at 87% highly satisfied and engaged, with many initiatives implemented in the 2017 school year, personal well-being was an important aspect to address. In 2017, the district was in the first year of implementation of a new literacy series, creating a comprehensive social-emotional learning curriculum, constructing a plan for technology and innovations for the entire district as well as rewriting the board goals and strategic plan for the next five years. With all this change and additional work, along with the daily tasks of being an educator, the focus also became the district's positive mindset.

In the spring of 2016, District XF worked collaboratively with the ITLN Network to purchase the intellectual property from Achor's Happiness Advantage book (Achor, 2011). The superintendent selected seven staff to become trainers. This group consisted of one assistant superintendent, three building principals, one director, and two district instructional coaches. ITLN provided training over several weeks to train the trainers to facilitate the training for the entire district. During the spring of 2016, a team of administrators was selected by the superintendent to create a follow-up curriculum. There were three separate groups consisting of four total administrators each with one initial administrator trainer and an assistant superintendent. The other administrators on the teams were from both the junior high and elementary schools and were a combination of both principals and assistant principals. These groupings allowed the perspective of each position and school to be heard and to provide the necessary information regarding the needs of the different buildings. The three groups utilized the Orange Frog Parable, The Happiness Advantage and the principles from the Orange Frog training to go deeper into

the content of the seven principles and to provide meaningful opportunities for personal reflections (Achor, 2011).

The Orange Frog Parable is a short story based on fictional frog characters that tell the principles of positive psychology in the simplest form. This parable was written to be used with adults as well as children. The parable showcases how engaging in tasks each day that bring you joy allows you to be more productive and eventually happier in life and that this feeling can be contagious to the individuals that surround you. This book is to be utilized as a prerequisite to the Orange Frog training so staff can have a foundational understanding of the principles outlined in the Happiness Advantage (Achor, 2011) without having to have read it. These lessons founded on the key aspects of the books and training were created for all buildings to use during staff development over the course of the 2017 school year to create a deeper understanding of the seven principles and sustain the dialogue around the importance of a positive mindset. This work was monitored for each of the 28 buildings through the School Improvement Plans (SIP) and performance review cycles. At each School Improvement Plan performance review cycle that occurred in the fall, winter and spring, we were asked to highlight the current culture goal and action plan and expand on how we were specifically addressing the Happiness Advantage in our individual school (Achor, 2011). In addition to this meeting, we had one meeting in September with the cabinet to discuss our plan for the implementation at our school related to staff development, special celebrations and reflection opportunities.

Competencies: Positive Psychology Principles in the Hands of Teachers

The competencies of administrators and staff vary across all 28 buildings. The seven trainers participated in several weeks of training with the ITLN network employees and have a thorough understanding of the happiness principles. Three of the trainers are building principals, myself included, and our schools have been able to benefit from our knowledge of the curriculum. Each of the building principals and assistant principals have participated in lessons created by the administrative team and have a foundational understanding of the principles to lead out staff development in each of their buildings. Administrator comfort level and buy-in varies similarly to the comfort level and buy-in of the staff across the district. To minimize the variance, the district cabinet members have allocated time during monthly administrator meetings to collaborate with other building administrators to brainstorm, provide feedback and reflect. These opportunities have allowed administrators to share ideas to bring back to each of the schools. The district has also created a shared Google Drive for administrators to upload artifacts and pictures to utilize with their staff.

Interpretation

The data was collected from three focus groups as well as an analysis of the district data from the HUMANeX survey and archival survey data collected by District XF. Two focus groups were comprised of certified staff and one was comprised of district administrators. The invitation to participate in each of the three focus groups was sent to two entire school staff and the entire administrative team to elicit participation from all building roles. I met two of the focus groups at their school sites and had them select the room that we would be meeting in. The intention was to allow the staff to feel

more comfortable sharing their experiences and opinions with me in a familiar space for them. The final focus group that consisted of district administrators was conducted at my school, in my office. All focus groups lasted anywhere from 45-60 minutes in length.

Focus group one from Sterling Elementary was comprised of five participants including the EL resource teacher, the literacy coach, the physical education teacher, one classroom teacher, and a self-contained special education teacher. Focus group two from Larkin Elementary was comprised of a classroom teacher, a special services teacher and a school psychologist. All three members of this focus group will not be continuing in their current position for the following year. One member of the group took on a new role as a district technology coach, one will be staying home with her children for the year and one will be retiring at the end of the school year. Focus group three consisted of six participants: four principals and two assistant principals. All participants were made aware that I am a building principal in District XF as well as a trainer for the Happiness Advantage implementation for the school district. The intention of sharing this information was to provide a bit of insight on my passion for this work and to let them know that I have no expectations around their thoughts or feelings towards positive psychology or the implementation work in each building. For these focus groups, I was serving as a neutral party collecting additional research outside of the work I do for the district.

Each focus group was asked questions related to their experience with positive psychology, how it has affected them both personally and professionally, changes it has made to their teaching practices and changes they have seen with their students.

(Appendices D and E)

Positive Psychology Principles

District XF brought positive psychology to its employees to create strategies and specific times during the work week to focus on the mental well-being of the staff. Some staff had previous personal experience with these concepts, but the subject was new to many participants. The first step was education and awareness through the book *Happiness Advantage*, the Orange Frog Parable, and the Orange Frog Workshop. District XF purchased all employees a copy of both books with the expectation that they were read prior to their training through the Orange Frog Workshop (Achor, 2011). These aspects of implementation provided staff with an understanding of what positive psychology is and the ability to see how it could impact their lives and the lives of those around them.

One focus group teacher participant stated:

“I tend to be more positive by nature but this gave me a deeper understanding on how this could impact other aspects of my life. It has also allowed me to see all the positive things that are happening around me and I have been aware and acknowledge it more and spreading it more.”

Through the training, staff were able to dive deeper into the seven principles of positive psychology to help provide a rationale and framework to continue this work back in the schools and at home.

Another teacher stated, “After the training, it was broken down on how simple it could be, it really took off in the building.” In education, there can be new initiatives such as state testing, balanced literacy, innovation, and even social emotional learning that are implemented each year in schools. It can be overwhelming for teachers at times and for staff to recognize after the training that these positive psychology strategies can be simple

and easy to implement into their daily lives. However, one out of fourteen staff members that participated in the focus groups felt differently.

One staff member shared:

“I’m excited that the district recognized there is a need to see what has been going on in the district. I think that there is an assumption that teachers are not happy and we are in our personal lives. I think this is another additional add on to things many people have already been doing.”

This staff member did acknowledge that the new connections and activities were positive, but expressed concern that it was an additional initiative to the work they were already doing. In contrast, a teacher stated, “happiness is an important part of success, mental help of staff and students is a large part of it.” With more than 20% of our society battling a mental illness over the course of one years’ time, it is important that employers, along with individuals themselves, make an effort to focus on how they can stay mentally healthy and more positive.

Overall, the staff from my focus groups felt that the explicit teaching of the positive psychology principles at the Orange Frog training helped them to see a real-world application of the workshop and training to their daily work with students. The training took the conceptual ideals from Achor’s book to instill more practical and attainable next steps that connect with aspects of their daily life that they are already engaged in.

Teacher Engagement

After the initial teaching on positive psychology, the implementation back in the school began. Staff participate in at least monthly staff development to continue to work on the seven principles as well as work to maintain a conscious effort to change their mindset into a more positive state through one of the 5 tactics: meditation, physical

activity, conscious acts of kindness, gratitude and/or journaling. All schools in District XF participated in monthly or bi-monthly staff development lessons during staff development to sustain the work on positive psychology in each of the 28 schools. These lessons are grounded in the seven core principles but have expanded to meet the individual needs of each building while utilizing new content provided from the district on positive psychology. Research demonstrated that when brains are in a more positive state of mind, people are more productive, more efficient, happier and in turn more successful. When staff was asked how the Happiness Advantage (Achor, 2011) affected them personally, one stated, “our comfort level has changed and we are more friendly, comfortable, open, more vulnerable with each other.” Part of being productive, efficient, and happier at work is knowing that you can count on and rely on your colleagues to support you and the work that you are doing. For a teacher, the members of one’s professional learning community (PLC) are their support network. They plan for rigorous instruction, analyze data, problem solve regarding student concerns, and at times vent with these teams. When you have a trusting relationship with your team, you can be more productive and efficient which can make you happier and less stressed.

Another focus group teacher said:

“It is breaking down walls that go up in the professional world, part of the happiness that we are finding is not a grand gesture, it is the simple things that allow us to be more vulnerable and honest with each other. There are many challenges that come up and we need each other to support each other and rely on each other and the happiness advantage allows for the freedom to take the time to do this.”

Thus, teachers are now focusing on the mental well-being of their teams after the training around positive psychology.

The change in buildings and the PLCs was noticed by the administration as well. It was noted that both personally and professionally, positive psychology training allowed teachers to have stronger, more purposeful connections with their families, colleagues and with their students. “After the training sessions, you really saw the change in culture, the conversations in PLCs, there was a better understanding on embracing happiness.”

The Orange Frog workshop provided opportunities for staff to connect with people outside of the PLCs for group activities, for partner work and even to create accountability partners for the work they were going to commit to continuing after the training. During the focus group with administrators, all six administrators noted that they could see an increased connectivity and interconnectedness amongst their staff immediately after the Orange Frog training. Staff felt more interconnected with each other at work and more comfortable to take risks. The awareness of the positive psychology after the Orange Frog training, has given them permission to be more vulnerable with each other and allowed them to step out of their comfort zone more when interacting with colleagues and while planning lessons for their students. This was visible in interactions seen and interactions that were shared by staff or on staff memos and/or bulletin boards. Staff that would typically not interact often, such as a physical education teacher and a special education teacher, were seen eating lunch together or walking the perimeter of the building on nice days. They had decided to become each other’s accountability partner at the Orange Frog training and the relationship took off from there. The amount of positive recognitions that were written on staff recognition boards in the staff lounges or shared with principals to include as shoutouts in their weekly Friday memos to the whole staff increased as well. These two examples embody the

interconnectedness amongst the staff after the initial training workshop. The following shifts after attending the Orange Frog training centered around positive psychology principles: increased comfort level with positivity and more positive interactions between staff which has formed stronger relationships.

District XF participates in the HUMANeX training twice a year to monitor the overall satisfaction and engagement of all their employees. The survey includes questions related to talent, support, relationships, communication, satisfaction, teaming, pride, innovation, and training. When teachers recognized the need to connect with others and create strong relationships within the workplace their levels of satisfaction and engagement in District XF increased.

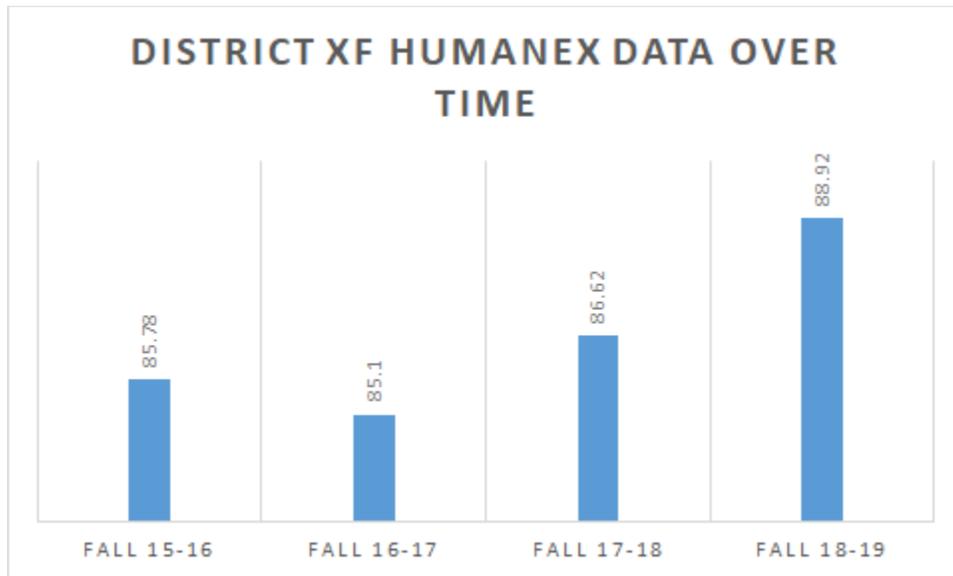


Figure 1: District XF HUMANeX data over time spanning over four years.

Figure 1 above depicts the total HUMANeX data for the entire district over a four year span of time. In the fall of 15-16 and 16-17, the implementation of positive psychology practices had not yet been implemented district wide. As illustrated in the chart above, the percentage the fall of 2017-18 reflects the overall satisfaction and engagement of all District XF after a full year's completion of positive psychology. The

data indicates that with the continued focus on staff well-being the level of satisfaction continues to improve in District XF.

Figure 2 below demonstrates that the results support the information collected from the focus groups, in that the implementation has increased comfort level and positive interactions between staff, who have thereby formed stronger relationships. All 37 questions had a positive change from the 2016-17 to 2017-18 school year. Although all survey questions had a positive improvement, there were four with the highest change from 2016-17 to 2017-18.

On a scale of 0 – 10	0 = Never : 10 = Always	17-18	16-17	Change
How often do you feel you are making progress towards accomplishing your work-related goals?		8.25	7.73	+0.52
At work, how often do you become absorbed in what you are doing?		8.80	8.53	+0.27
At work, how often do you feel joyful?		8.02	7.49	+0.53
How often do you achieve the important work goals you have set for yourself?		8.29	7.97	+0.32
At work, how often do you feel positive?		8.32	7.86	+0.46
How often are you able to handle your work-related responsibilities?		8.87	8.59	+0.28
At work, how often do you lose track of time while doing something you enjoy?		7.68	6.90	+0.78
At work, how often do you feel sad?		1.85	2.19	-0.34 <i>positive change</i>
At work, how often do you feel angry?		2.22	2.68	-0.46 <i>positive change</i>
At work, how often do you feel anxious?		4.93	4.94	-0.01 <i>positive change</i>
On a scale of 0 - 10	0 = Terrible : 10 = Excellent	17-18	16-17	Change
In general, how would you say your health is?		8.01	7.75	+0.26
Compared to others of your same age and sex, how is your health?		7.90	7.65	+0.25
On a scale of 0 - 10	0 = Not At All : 10 = Completely	17-18	16-17	Change
To what extent is your work purposeful and meaningful?		9.05	8.59	+0.46
To what extent do you receive help and support from co-workers when you need it?		8.89	8.47	+0.42
In general, to what extent do you feel that what you do at work is valuable and worthwhile?		9.00	8.49	+0.51
To what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work?		8.87	8.32	+0.55
How satisfied are you with your current physical health?		7.16	6.87	+0.29
To what extent do you feel appreciated by your co-workers?		8.09	7.66	+0.43
To what extent do you generally feel that you have a sense of direction in your work?		8.59	8.16	+0.43
How satisfied are you in your professional relationships?		8.41	8.03	+0.38
At work, to what extent do you feel contented?		8.18	7.67	+0.51
Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your work?		8.40	7.87	+0.53
How lonely do you feel at work?		2.00	2.17	-0.17 <i>positive change</i>
On a scale of 0 - 5	0 = Almost Never : 5 = Almost Always	17-18	16-17	Change
Having a positive attitude matters around here.		4.73	4.54	+0.19
What I do matters.		4.61	4.38	+0.23
What I think matters.		4.30	4.02	+0.28
I like trying to be my best.		4.89	4.83	+0.06
On a scale of 0 - 5	0 = Strongly Disagree : 5 = Strongly Agree	17-18	16-17	Change
In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.		3.96	3.90	+0.06
Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.		4.20	4.13	+0.07
If something can go wrong for me, it will.		2.09	2.10	-0.01
I'm always optimistic about my future.		4.07	3.99	+0.08
I hardly ever expect things to go my way.		1.90	1.93	-0.03 <i>positive change</i>
I rarely count on good things happening to me.		1.89	1.92	-0.03 <i>positive change</i>
On a scale of 0 - 5	0 = Not At All : 5 = Extremely	17-18	16-17	Change
How creative have you been over the past few weeks?		3.83	3.58	+0.25
How much energy have you felt over the last few weeks?		3.77	3.38	+0.39
How productive have you been over the past few weeks?		4.24	4.03	+0.21
How much stress have you felt over the last few weeks?		3.33	3.42	-0.09 <i>positive change</i>

Figure 2: District XF Happiness Survey Results.

As depicted in Figure 2, the most significant change was noted at a positive change of .78, when staff were asked how often they lost track of time while doing

something they enjoyed at work. Based on previous responses of staff from focus groups, they feel that they have the autonomy and time to engage in work related to positivity and relationships with their colleagues and students. They also have a greater sense of interconnectedness with their colleagues and engage in this work alongside them. The other most significant changes were seen when staff was asked, how often they feel joy, to what extent do you feel excited and interested in your work and taking all things together, how happy would you say you are with your work. These questions all exhibited a positive increase of .53. Allowing staff to see that they can take time to celebrate not only their colleagues but themselves can be seen through the increased levels of joy, excitement, and happiness at work. Specific ways that staff were bringing joy into the workplace was shared during the focus groups interviews. It was noted that one building created a system to send treats to their colleagues each week, one teacher had daily check-ins with their accountability partner to monitor their positivity progress and another school noted the daily meditation they lead their students in after recess to reset their brains to be ready for the work in the afternoon. These are examples that exemplify joy, interest and happiness through the district.

Broadview Elementary School was inconsistent with their attempts to build school culture as noted previously. In the spring of the 2015-16 school year, their HUMANeX data of highly satisfied and engaged was recorded at 69% and in the fall of 2016-17 school year it was recorded at 67% highly satisfied and engaged.

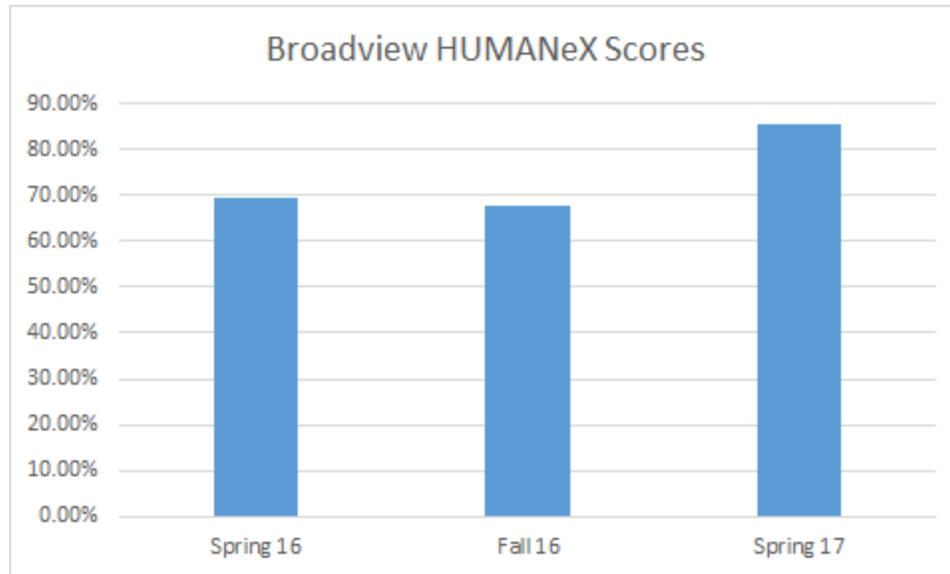


Figure 3: Broadview HUMANeX Scores in the fall over a three year span.

As depicted in Figure 3 above, after the implementation of positive psychology principles, specific Orange Frog training, and dedicated time during staff development for whole staff lessons and culture building activities their scores increased. The amount of staff highly satisfied and engaged increased by almost 12% from 69% in the spring of 2016 to 85% in the spring of 2017.

District XF has witnessed change regarding teacher engagement in both anecdotal and formalized forms. Teachers and administrators both noted that there was noticeable change across the school settings in regarding the interconnectedness of their staff across all teams. This has led to stronger relationships and a greater support network for individual staff members. District XF has also observed improvement in the levels of satisfaction and engagement on their yearly whole district HUMANeX survey after the implementation of positive psychology. It was also seen on an individual level with my school, Broadview, over the course of the past three years.

Positive School Culture/Student Achievement

The positive psychology principles have engendered more enthusiasm around learning for both the staff and the students in this district. However, due to the newness of the implementation of positive psychology principles in District XF, a direct correlation between positive psychology and student achievement has not yet been observed.

Members of all three focus groups did acknowledge the impact positive psychology has had on the mindset of both teachers and students as they attempt challenging testing requirements such as common assessments, Measures of Achievement Progress (MAP), or Partnership for Assessments of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Many students that were afraid to take risks are now more comfortable. It was noted that, “we have the kids look at the assessments as a positive, we are calling them celebrations of knowledge and have them reflect and focus on the positive.” This shift in mindset has allowed the students a more relaxed environment to showcase their knowledge than the previous high stakes and high stress classrooms. The administrators have noticed the change in the classroom environments as well.

One administrator noted that there has not been tangible data to show yet:

“But there is more of a focus on the growth mindset and the level of perseverance. The extra step of encouragement is letting the kids push there. There is a different energy and vibe that we can’t put our finger on. Another School Leadership Team (SLT) member said it is because of how we are choosing to show up because we are choosing to show up differently.”

The environment that they are creating is one in which if they take risks, they will learn. Thus, a new level of confidence has been observed by both our teachers and students.

The improvement of student achievement due directly to positive psychology has not yet been seen by the district. The staff recognizes a change in the mindset and attitudes as students embark on more challenging or stressful academic tasks or assessments which have led to more effort and more time spent on each specific task. Additionally, the students have been able to persevere through tasks that they would previously have given up on. This mindset can be attributed to the focus on social emotional learning and positive psychology practices with our students. With instructional initiatives changing each year as well as the standardized tests themselves changing in test type, format, and the use of technology, it is nearly impossible to isolate the one driving factor in student academic achievement each year.

Judgements

Prior to conducting my focus groups and compiling data from district surveys, I established several research questions. These research questions were used to drive the focus groups conducted. The information collected from the focus groups, HUMANex data and district archived data support that after the implementation of positive psychology principles there was an improvement in teacher engagement in the District XF schools. It was noted by a teacher that, “I think that the teachers are happier and it rubs it off on the kids. We are more grateful, we need more breaks, and we are more aware to provide that to them.” There is a freedom that teachers felt after the implementation of Happiness Advantage that allowed them to take time for themselves to work to be in a more positive state of mind (Achor, 2011). When teachers focused on their connectivity with each other they were able to form stronger relationships with not just their colleagues, but also with their students and were able to observe increased

levels of academic success in the classroom. One aspect of the training that all district employees received focused on incorporating one of the five tactics into their daily lives: mediation, conscious acts of kindness, physical activity, journaling, or gratitude. In a study conducted by Howell (2014), teachers that engaged in daily recognition of gratitude regarding their students had an increase in positive interactions with students as well as an overall inner attitude regarding their students. These increased social interactions not only change attitudes but also strengthen relationships.

As noted by district staff:

“The principles created more of a connection with the kids, greetings kids that they don’t even work with, the simple social interactions improve the school. As a whole our culture has gotten a lot better for the students and the staff.”

When stronger relationships are formed across the district and within the schools, building culture can improve.

These shifts in the culture of the individual schools and District XF as a whole have improved the satisfaction and engagement level in district employees. The HUMANeX data collected each fall supports an increase in highly satisfied and highly engaged staff after the implementation of positive psychology. The research questions focused on student achievement and the connection it has to teacher engagement and student engagement was not seen in this study. The initial phase of implementation was solely on the mental well-being of teachers and district employees. There were teachers across the district that brought activities to classrooms but this was not an expectation or recommendation from the central office nor was it monitored by school administrators. In the 2017-2018 school year, there were also new instructional initiatives for literacy, mathematics and the use of technology devices. A new textbook adoption was also

adopted for the literacy series, new mathematics strategies for whole group instruction, and both iPads and Chromebooks were being piloted at multiple school sites. Due to these additional changes that occurred simultaneously with the Happiness Training, it impacted the ability to isolate any improvements to student engagement levels and student achievement specifically related to positive psychology. In this study, achievement data from standardized and normed testing, specifically the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments, was reviewed. The findings indicated minimal change on both reading and mathematics.

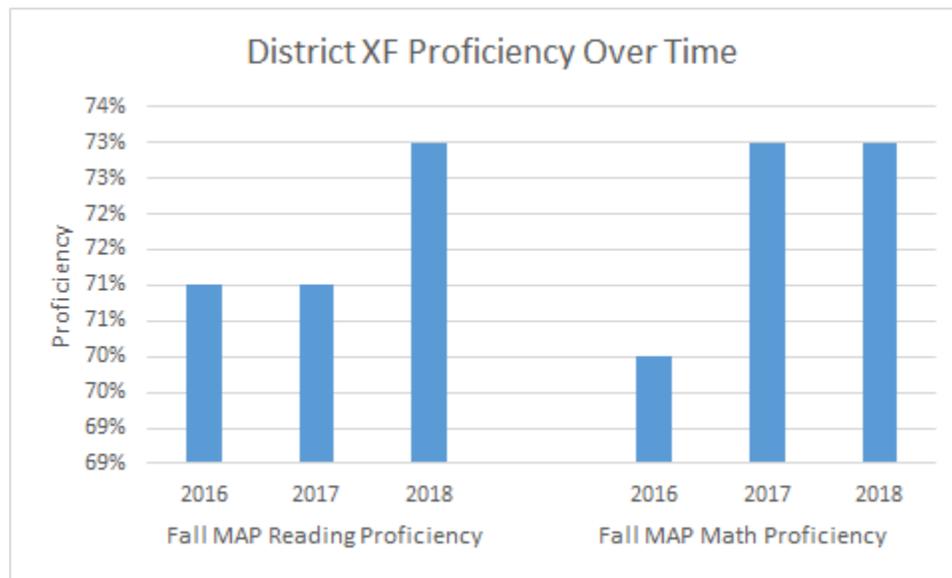


Figure 4: District academic proficiency over time for three years.

Using MAP, District XF monitors students' proficiency. Proficiency is measured as at or above the 40%tile. The increase in both fall MAP reading and math proficiency can be noted in *Figure 4*. There were no significant changes observed across the district. Both the teachers and administrators in the three focus groups noted that it was too soon to see the impact the implementation would have on student achievement in just the past six to seven months' time. The subsequent years of implementation would provide the

district a clearer picture of the impact positive psychology and teacher engagement has on student achievement.

In summation, the implementation of positive psychology principles within a school system had a positive impact on relationships and engagement for the District XF employees. More time is necessary to be able to accurately assess if there is an increase in academic achievement for students when specific time is allocated for the practice of positive psychology principles with staff and students.

Recommendations

Based on the information collected from the focus groups, the HUMANeX survey and the district survey, it is recommended that District XF allocate time during the work week for mental well-being of all district employees. According to facts shared from Dworak-Peck of the USC School of Social Work, mental illnesses cost the United States more than \$200 million dollars in lost earnings each year (15 Mental Health Facts You Should Know, n.d.). Although school areas are non-profit organizations, the job of educators is to educate the next generation for their future careers. Given the workload and the high burnout rate of teachers, teachers' mental well-being needs to be addressed. Time should be allocated to incorporate the five tactics into the teachers' day for delving deeper into each of the seven principles. The district should also continue to emphasize the importance of the well-being of their staff by embedding the implementation of the Happiness Advantage principles into staff development and district level professional development (Achor, 2011). With the rise in mental health issues in children and adults, businesses, organizations and schools need to be cognizant of how the stressors of the workload and the culture of their organization impacts the employees. The work of the

ITLN Network and the positive psychology principles provide a concrete approach to providing individuals strategies to be more positive, more productive and more efficient in all aspects of their lives. A common language amongst all stakeholders within a district and an individual school will help to increase not only the awareness, but also the impact it has on connectivity and relationships.

CHAPTER FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

School culture is an important aspect of the academic success of students. The teachers have the most direct contact with students and therefore have the most impact on their academic progress. If the culture of a building is toxic this will carry over into the classroom just as if the culture of a school is thriving it too will spill over into the classroom. Districts, administrators, teachers and all other school personnel need to make the conscious effort to create a sustainable vision and plan to address the needs of the teachers and the building to maintain or improve the culture of a school.

In 2017, District XF, brought the Happiness Advantage by Achor (2011) to entire district. The focus on positive psychology became one of the district initiatives for the 2017-2018 school year. All staff attended a full day Orange Frog workshop and each building spent time during staff development to elaborate on the core ideas taught at that workshop. When time is allocated to implementing practices that will increase positivity, resilience and efficiency, does the overall school culture increase? When staff and administrators are given the opportunity to provide structured professional development as well as time to plan activities that boost satisfaction and engagement, do people feel more connected to the success of the students in their classrooms?

Cardinal School District in Iowa, began their implementation of the Happiness Advantage principles and the Orange Frog training in 2010. Cardinal School District was searching for a change because “it’s reputation preceded it; located in the poorest of the ninety-nine counties in Iowa, Cardinal was rated in the bottom ten percent of schools nationwide” (Achor, 2018, p. 92). After providing training for the entire district staff including secretaries, custodians, lunch supervisors, and bus drivers, they began to observe a change in the total engagement level of students and staff across their entire school. The scores for their students on normed academic tests such as the ACT test improved by four points for the first time in seven years and a bond had passed in the community to expand the high school and provide more resources for the students of Cardinal (Achor, 2018). Cardinal’s success was created by acknowledging that when mindsets shift and begin to function in a more positive staff, school culture and student achievement increase (Achor, 2018). The success of the Cardinal School District is utilized throughout the Orange Frog training as an example of the implementation in a school district and to build credibility that this work truly can change not only the workplace of businesses but also of schools. It was utilized as model of how the work can be implemented in District XF.

During the 2017-2018 school year, the directive from the superintendent was to solely utilize the strategies of Happiness Advantage to improve the mental well-being of the staff. However, in the spring of 2017, the superintendent worked with one of the twenty-eight schools to bring the principles of positive psychology not just to the staff but to the students as a district pilot. At this school, the students were explicitly taught the seven happiness principles as well as the five tactics that retrain the brain to function at a

more positive state. These tactics are 15 minutes of daily physical activity, conscious acts of kindness, journaling, meditation, and recording instances of gratitude each day (Achor, 2011). The implementation for the students took place in the spring of 2017. At the culmination of the school year, both the students and staff were surveyed to measure their current levels of happiness and positivity. They found that “after just twenty-one days, they found that 91 percent of students felt happier at school, 70 percent felt happier outside of school, and 85 percent believed they could still learn to be happier. And, a full 96.3 percent of staff and faculty felt more positive at the end of the three-week journey” (Achor, 2018, p.97). Achor continues to work with District XF and use their system implementation process as an example for other school districts and business organizations. He has used the testimonials and data shared by District XF and their staff in his latest book *Big Potential* (2018). In District XF, when explicitly teaching and providing time during the school day to practice the positive psychology principles, increased levels of positivity were able to be achieved by both students and staff.

It is important to discuss school culture as it relates to direct implementation of the Happiness Advantage principles with both staff and administrators through focus groups interviews (Achor, 2011). This will allow staff the opportunity to reflect and give feedback on the direct focus on the individual improvement of each staff member that the district has taken. The feedback given compared to the data collected from district survey allowed the researcher to determine if professional development on positive psychology affected work satisfaction and student achievement.

Envisioning the Success TO-BE:

Context: Improving School Culture

As mentioned above, District XF has implemented the Happiness Advantage Principles across the entire district (Achor, 2011). Over 2,000 staff members from all 28 schools in the district were trained in the initial Orange Frog workshop. Before any systematized principles that focused on school culture were implemented, the district had an 86% level of overall satisfaction and engagement at work on the HUMANeX survey. Each building was asked to expand upon the individual principles in each of their respective schools. After the implementation of the principles during the 2017-2018 school year, it was expected that the overall HUMANeX results would increase to above 86% and increase in all staff's individual satisfaction in life and work. It was also anticipated there should also be an increase in student achievement as measured on the MAP test from fall to spring in the 2017-2018 school year.

Culture: Identifying the Individual Building Uniqueness

District XF is generally a high achieving district both academically and culturally. The overall satisfaction level of District XF schools differs and to address this each building has allocated time during staff development to teach the Happiness Advantage principles (Achor, 2011) in depth. The lessons created in each building and the activities and degree of understanding from the staff is inconsistent. The activities centered around Happiness Advantage (Achor, 2011) can change depending on the belief and comfort level of the building administrator. Each building's depth of implementation is a direct reflection of the building committee and the focus of the administrator. After the implementation, the district range of HUMANeX scores should level out so there is not a drastic difference between the highest and lowest achieving culture scores. All teachers

should be able to articulate the seven principles of positive psychology as well as teach them to the students.

Conditions: Providing Adequate Training on Improving School Culture

Each year, schools in District XF have been asked to create a SMART goal for the School Improvement Plan that directly related to school culture and specifically aligned to the HUMANeX scores. The action plans that schools generated to meet these goals were solely based on the ideas and traditions that were held in each of the unique buildings. There was no consistency with strategies that impact individuals' well-being or school culture that were universal for the entire district. With the current plans for building positive school culture, the schools that had seen success remained thriving and others that struggled to remain struggling. The blame for the low school culture was typically placed on individual teachers or the administration. The district asked the schools to create a culture goal again for the 2017-2018 school year, but it was to be measured by a variety of sources. These sources could collect data from reflections, informal conversations, committee recommendations, and school leadership team feedback. Additionally, the action steps were much more specific and aligned with the research behind the Happiness Advantage Principles (Achor, 2011). It should be an expectation that each school utilizes the follow up lessons created by the district team as extensions to the workshop to guarantee that all staff across the district are at a minimum receiving the same information to sustain the work on positive mindset. This will allow the focus to not be built on individual growth and mindset, but rather the contributions of all staff to the collective growth of the building. The goal was to see the percentage of

teachers satisfied and engaged in each building will increase despite the new initiatives each year and the demands that are placed on classroom teachers.

As each new year begins, so do the initiatives and projects started at the district level and funneled down through each individual school. With the focus on positive psychology principles, adequate time needs to be allocated to learn, practice, and reflect on each of the principles during staff development each month. With the growing demands on the planning and preparation for teachers, time should be allocated each week during grade level planning sessions to positive mindset. This time will be spent celebrating the positives aspects of the past week, which aligns with the Tetris Effect principle and planning for the upcoming week and strategies to implement for themselves personally (Achor, 2011). This could be in the form of a joy jar, which is a jar to collect written notes of gratitude for the week or weekly gratitude journal; both are ways to record and remember the positives that have happened to an individual on the team or the team as a whole. In addition to planning minutes, embedding time during staff development each month to focus on the Happiness Advantage principles with the staff across the entire district (Achor, 2011). I believe time should be built in to the weekly schedule to explicitly teach the positive psychology principles to the students. Along with social emotional learning, the focus on positive psychology for the students will provide them opportunities to foster a positive state of mind through activities centered around gratitude, acts of kindness and meditation. Activities will be planned for classrooms as well as across the building. Individual classrooms can choose to participate in a similar fashion to their teachers with methods such as joy jars, gratitude journals, and identifying celebrations, and the entire school can spend time participating in similar activities but in

a larger scale. To sustain these practices with students, a shared drive will be created to save ideas, lessons and even pictures for teachers to utilize with their own students. In order to sustain this work at the individual school sites, a committee will be formed with staff representation from each role to provide feedback, reflect and plan for future action steps for the building in regards to students and staff. This will allow staff to share what has been successful for their teams and classrooms and the areas they need to continue to address to improve.

Competencies: Positive Psychology Principles in the Hands of Teachers

The competency levels of the staff in District XF vary as well as their ability to embrace change and new ideas and strategies. This can be seen in their varying HUMANeX scores and 5 Essentials results regarding collaborative teachers, supportive environment, and effective leaders. The goal after the implementation of the principles of positive psychology is to provide staff with the tools to improve their well-being and increase their positive mindset to be able to face any stressor, challenge, or obstacle that arises during the school day or over the course of the school year. As mentioned in the building conditions, this will be achieved by the ongoing professional development at the school sites and the emphasis of celebrations at the start of each team and building meeting. Staff will be able to articulate the seven principles and share which has been the most beneficial to their daily lives. After a year of focusing solely on the staff, we will bring our focus to implement these principles with the students so they can also become more aware of their mindset and how to consciously change it to a more positive state. This will allow the district to experience not only growth in the school culture, but also the school's over achievement levels.

CONCLUSION

The context, culture, conditions and competencies of the implementation of positive psychology principles determine the success of the entirety of school culture. When District XF ensures that all staff are equipped with the tools to change their mindset to a more positive state, the overall culture should improve across all settings and buildings. Systematic changes were made in District XF to implement and monitor the principles of positive psychology across the entire district.

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

INTRODUCTION

School culture can impact not only the overall engagement of the teachers, but also the academic success of the student body. Achor (2011) states that, “scientists discovered more proof that happiness causes success when they started examining how positive emotions affect our brain function and change our behavior” (p. 43). His research clearly states the importance of the correlation between success and positivity. Knowing that positivity can impact a person’s achievement, schools should put on emphasis on positive school culture for teachers to be most productive at school. A more positive teacher should be more successful and productive than a negative teacher. In this regard, “data abounds showing that happy workers have higher levels of productivity, produce higher sales, perform better in leadership positions, and receive higher performance ratings and higher pay” (Achor, 2011, p. 41). The more productive staff is, the more that is accomplished, the more engaged the students will be, and then in turn the more success a school will achieve both academically and behaviorally. When staff is in

a more positive mindset, student achievement can also increase. Therefore, “the most important element in motivating students to want to achieve at high standards: the quality of *relationships* with their teachers. It has always been true that students tend to learn very little from teachers who they feel are not respectful towards them” (Wagner, 2012, p. 42). When teachers are more positive, students will respond to their positivity and learn more because of the social emotional status of the school staff.

Context Barrier

District XF values student growth both academically, socially, and emotionally. To monitor each school’s progress throughout the school year, building administration meets with district cabinet members to discuss student growth for literacy and mathematics as it is monitored by local and state assessments and culture and by the biannual HUMANeX survey. The review cycle that is held in the fall, winter and spring is structured by the cabinet. Building administration alongside staff are asked to identify celebrations and areas to focus on, assessment of the current systems, and procedures in place to monitor student growth, areas of support that are required to address the gaps each building is facing as well as an action plan for each goal area: literacy, mathematics and culture. This process is repeated two more times with just the building administrator. Each fall a team of building staff come together to analyze the spring and fall data and to create SMART goals and action plans to address the three main areas of: literacy, mathematics and culture. This information is then shared with the whole building after it is shared with cabinet. Measures of Academic progress have traditionally been used to monitor progress for literacy, and math; however, there has never been a definitive way to monitor the third goal for school culture. The HUMANeX survey provides an

anonymous rating of how a building is performing but does not provide strategies or supports to address building cultural needs. A systematic district-wide program is not in place to support the social-emotional needs of staff that would improve school culture.

Competencies Barrier

As part of the School Improvement Plan (SIP), all district administrators are part of the School Improvement Process that sets building goals, creates action plans, and monitors progress as the school year progresses. Teachers are provided on-going professional development and curriculum resources to provide high quality instruction as part of the action steps for both the literacy and mathematics components of the SIP. Teachers, however, are not provided any professional development or content related to positive psychology and/or mindset, yet they are expected to make progress on their classroom culture by the end of the school year. With the implementation of the Happiness Advantage Principles through the Orange Frog training, not only all district administrators but all district employees will have access to positive psychology principles that can directly impact the school culture goal as well as include all district employees as part of the action steps in improving the overall building culture (Achor, 2011).

Conditions Barrier

District XF expects that each building principal is focused on improving each individual school culture and it is measured through the School Improvement Plan. Currently, there is not a formalized process or program in place to support building administrators and staff as goals and action plans around school culture are created. In a district with almost 30 schools, there is a large variance in building culture that can be

felt when one enters a building or talk to the staff in each building. Teachers and administrators are not equipped with the same abilities or strategies to successfully address the culture in each individual school.

Culture Barrier

It is a combination of the environment and the people that impact school culture that can be sensed within seconds of entering a school. Effective strategies to address improving school culture are not taught in principal preparation programs and are not readily available for professional development workshops. The people are the factor in determining the success in all schools.

District XF has invested in the principles of positive psychology for the entire district. Consistent implementation of the principles in all buildings, transferring the principles to the students and creating sustainability across the district will make an impact on school culture across the district. The table below describes the strategies and action steps that District XF will take to implement positive psychology principles across the district.

Table 2: Strategies and Action

Strategies	Actions
Research program to address positive mindset and school culture	District cabinet members made up of the superintendent, associate superintendent and multiple assistant superintendents will research and identify the appropriate strategies/program to foster a positive mindset (fall 2016)
Implement a specific intervention to improve school culture and positive mindset	Partner with International Thought Leader Network (ITLN) to utilize their Orange Frog Workshop for all district staff (fall 2016)

	<p>Train all administrators in the principles of positive psychology through the Orange Frog training (September 2016)</p> <p>Train seven staff members to be facilitate the Orange Frog training for the entire district (May 2017)</p> <p>Train all staff in the principles of positive psychology through the Orange Frog Training (August-October 2017)</p>
Sustain principles in each school	<p>Cabinet will meet with each administrator to generate school action plan to sustain and deepen the principles at each site (October 2017)</p> <p>Each school forms a Happiness Committee to train and implement each principle in each school</p> <p>All principles are taught to each building over the course of the school year (October 2017)</p> <p>Members of the Happiness Committees participate in a refresher training mid-year (January 2018)</p> <p>Activities, lessons and artifacts are shared amongst all district administrators to utilize in their buildings through Google Drive (Monthly)</p>
Use data to monitor effectiveness of positive psychology principles	<p>Administer Happiness surveys in the spring before Orange Frog training and again in the spring after all staff has been trained (May 2017 and May 2018)</p> <p>Administer the HUMANeX survey both in the fall and spring to monitor overall work satisfaction and engagement (September and April yearly)</p> <p>Opportunities for reflection at each of the sites to monitor school culture for individual buildings (January and May yearly)</p>
Increase teacher capacity to implement positive psychology principles	<p>Highlight activities that teachers have utilized with the students through staff memos, social media and the School Leadership Teams monthly</p> <p>Share activities with parent community through newsletters and social media weekly</p> <p>Provide monthly opportunities during staff development to reflect and articulate with colleagues strategies that have been effective with students</p>

To improve school culture, which would consequently affect teacher engagement and student achievement, *The Happiness Advantage* and the principles of positive psychology, must be implemented throughout District XF schools (Achor, 2011).

Conditions: Specific intervention to improve school culture

The first strategy to improve the overall school culture in District XF is to implement a universal program across the district to support the positive psychology principles and enhance the positive mindset of all staff. The district should implement the positive psychology principles outlined in Achor's book, *The Happiness Advantage* (Achor, 2011) and have the entire district attend the Orange Frog workshop. They will have to utilize a "train the trainer" model where the seven Orange Frog workshop trainers train all District XF employees prior to winter break. The principles described in the Orange Frog training will help staff to reframe and reshape their mindset to be at a more positive emotional state (Achor, 2011). The training will provide a consistent message across all schools in the district and provide actionable strategies that can be implemented immediately at the individual sites. The training will focus on the three core ideas: happiness is a choice, embrace positive outliers, and create space for positive emotions. Each core idea will be addressed in the training to provide staff specific strategies to make more positive choices in life, surround themselves with more positive individuals, and be strategic with their daily schedule to embed time for reflection, recognition, or mediation throughout each day.

Competencies: Sustain principles in each school

The next strategy that the district will need to implement is a plan to sustain the work initially begun at the Orange Frog training throughout the school year and beyond. To guarantee that all buildings will continue the implementation process even if resistance or opposition to the mental well-being of staff occurs, each building administrative team will meet with cabinet to outline the actionable steps that they will be taking at their individual school site to implement the seven principles at a more profound level. The schools have the autonomy to meet the needs of their staff and move forward at a pace that will allow for continuous improvement. The minimum requirement will be that the monthly lessons are taught during monthly professional development time and staff is provided time for reflection regarding their own personal mindset weekly and monthly during plan time. Each school will be asked to select a team of teachers to join a Happiness Committee at each school that will implement the action plan over the course of the school year. This team of teachers will be the utilized as the key implementers at each building. They will provide staff opportunities to reflect and provide feedback on the action plan and next steps for their school during the monthly professional development lessons. This feedback will be utilized to plan future lessons, staff activities and staff social engagements. All lessons are required but the activities and social engagements are optional for anyone that does not want to participate. There will be two master staff that are selected by the building administration from each building's Happiness Committee that will continually meet with staff from other buildings to provide on-going feedback and, share resources and content from their specific building. These building representatives will be provided release time during the school day twice a year to come together at the district office. During these sessions, the representatives

will be asked to share out activities that they have planned for both their staff and students. After the share sessions, time will be given to these teacher teams to plan for the next steps in their schools. All resources will be shared in a Google folder for future reference. The district office will also create a Google folder that will be created for administrators only to share resources that have been effective in teaching each principle at their individual sites.

Context: Use data to monitor effectiveness of positive psychology principles

The next strategy will be to monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the core principles across the entire district. The district will create surveys that will be administered to all district employees that will be used to monitor overall happiness and satisfaction prior to the Orange Frog training, after the training and at the end of the school year after the first year of implementation. The district will continue to use the normed HUMANeX survey given to staff twice a year to monitor their overall satisfaction and engagement regarding their team, their schools and the district. The results will be utilized to monitor the culture goal created as part of the School Improvement Plan. Each individual site will also create ongoing opportunities for feedback from the staff to monitor, tweak, and change the professional development plan created by the Happiness Committee to align the activities to the needs of the staff. Each trimester, buildings will view their School Improvement Plans to monitor their action plans specific to the whole school culture goal. Teams will reflect on their current positive psychology practices and what will be their goals for the upcoming trimester. Reflection time will also be built into the monthly agendas for School Leadership Teams. The SLT will reflect on past activities and provide feedback on the upcoming plan

created by the Happiness Committee. All feedback will be brought to the committee for future planning.

Culture: Increase teacher capacity to implement positive psychology principles

The final strategy will be to increase the capacity of the teachers to embed the principles into their daily lives and in the lives of their students. Building administration and the district office will create online platforms and social media sites that are specific to the Happiness Advantage implementation. This will allow for ideas to be highlighted and shared across all schools in the district. These sites will also provide teachers the platform to share with their parent community the activities that are being utilized amongst the teachers and with the students that provide positive mindset and an increased sense of community. Each school should have two Happiness Representatives that meet at least twice a year with the other school representatives. These representatives will oversee adding resources and activities to the online shared platform. Each school will be required to add at least one artifact or each of the three trimesters students are in session. Building principals will connect with their representatives to ensure this has been completed for their building at the end of the trimester. Monthly time will be allocated to the principles of positive psychology to provide teachers the research behind each principle, an opportunity to self-reflect, as well as time to generate ideas and reflection with their colleagues related to each principle and its presence in the individual school site.

CONCLUSION

To successfully implement a program to improve school culture, the current state needs to be assessed, an action plan created and finally implemented across the district

through the School Improvement Plan process. In this change plan, the positive psychology principles will be utilized across the district to target the goal of improving school culture in each school site. District XF's school board and cabinet members value specific professional development time around positive mental well-being that they have allocated district funds to implement the Orange Frog training focused on the positive psychology principles. To do this, training will need to be provided to all staff in the form of on-going professional development to provide a deeper understanding of each principle, opportunities for feedback and reflection, and time to collaborate with colleagues on each principle. The whole district training, monthly staff development activities, school Happiness Committees, and activities for the students will target the current mindset of staff and challenge them with specific strategies that can be implemented to become more engaged, productive, and happy. To maintain a more engaged, productive, and happy staff over time, district policy related to social emotional well-being of staff should be reviewed yearly.

CHAPTER 7: POLICY ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Policies are intended to provide a framework for school districts and their students, staff, and families across all settings and provide a foundational understanding and perspective to school related topics and situations. Policies are written to provide a clearer understanding to topics such as: student attendance, student discipline, technology usage, codes of conduct and many more. In this study, positive psychology practices when embedded into the workplace have been demonstrated to lead to improved school

culture. To maintain a positive school culture, a specific policy must be implemented to guarantee that all school personnel as well as students and families have a common understanding on the district's perspective on maintaining positivity at each individual building.

The research provided in previous sections has highlighted that when schools and individuals purposefully focus on creating a positive mindset they have higher levels of work satisfaction, efficiency and an overall more positive outlook on all tasks asked of them. Achor's research presented that that when people find greater levels of happiness and positivity they have seen more success multiple aspects of their lives from work to friendships. Research has demonstrated that when individuals make a conscious effort to complete simple tasks like writing about moments of gratitude, meditating, or exercising their brains, they will be in a more positive state. Individuals that are in a more positive grateful state can pull from a wider range of experiences at any point in their lives. Minds that are in a positive state are able to stand and find things to be grateful for than people who are in a negative state of mind (Chan, 2010). These tasks are simple enough to be completed by both young children or grown adults and can be embedded into a classroom morning routine or daily social-emotional lessons so that the level of classroom community can be elevated, and students are able to achieve to their fullest potential. Therefore, I recommend developing a positive psychology policy that outlines the specific and focused work for staff to create a positive mindset founded in the work of Shawn Achor and his positive psychology principles.

Policy

Staff social and emotional support shall be incorporated in the district's staff development program and shall be aligned to the research based positive psychology practices.

The objectives for addressing the needs of staff for social and emotional support through staff development are to:

1. Foster a safe, supportive working environment where staff feel positive, respected and valued
2. Provide foundational lessons related to positive psychology practices for all adults
3. Prevent or minimize mental health problems in staff.

Policy Statement

Three years ago, District XF had a strong focus on building culture in each of the 28 individual schools as well as the district office. The culture of each school was truly dependent on what the administrator was passionate about and its degree of depth was dependent on them as well. There was little consistency across the district and some buildings lacked a strong sense of community or culture. District XF's Superintendent, after reading *The Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor (2011), worked with the district cabinet members and the school board to pursue the possibility of a partnership with Achor. The district had never had a districtwide program or practices that focused specifically on personal mental wellness for the staff. In 2017, District XF partnered with Shawn Achor and the International Thought Leader Network to bring the principles of *The Happiness Advantage* and the Orange Frog workshop into the culture of the district.

This brought continuity across the district as it began to center its work on the seven core principles as well as provided specific lessons that were created by district administrators to be implemented through staff development over the course of the entire school year. As this work began based on the HUMANeX Engagement and Satisfaction survey as well as other district created surveys, the overall culture improved across the district. The district had an overall score of 89% of employees who were highly satisfied and highly engagement in their work across the district in the fall of 2018-2019 as opposed to the 85% percent 3 years ago.

The improved results of the HUMANeX survey for District XF reinforce the importance of utilizing positive psychology practices to improve school culture for both the entire district and individual schools. Similarly to student discipline policies and instruction implementation policies, this will be a framework that provides school administrators the approval to embed positivity into their daily practices and set school improvement goals centered around the well-being of individuals. The creation of a policy will emphasize the importance that the district holds on positive mental health for not only the students but also the staff.

Analysis of Needs

When creating or changing district policies, many factors need to be considered to fully understand the need and how it will impact the district, teachers, students and community.

Educational Analysis

The research around positive psychology interventions at the business, school and organizational level is recent but each study has observed an improvement in the emotional state of participants when utilizing positive psychology in the setting. When the emotional state of teachers and students is more positive, efficient, and productive, the work of teachers can be completed. In terms of teacher well-being, “when they feel a sense of joy, play, laughter and fun at work; they are more encouraged to take risks in their teaching” (Cherkowski, 2018, pg. 2). Teachers will be more available for purposeful planning to create engaging lessons that will improve student achievement. In a similar manner to student instructional implementation, professional development time should be provided to staff to provide the time to practice the positive psychology strategies and reflect on their current mental wellbeing to allow these strategies to become habit and part of their daily practices. The same is true for positive psychology principles. For staff to truly understand and internalize these practices, they need time both during the school day as well as full day workshops to lead and practice strategies. Time during already allocated staff development on Wednesday afternoons should be used to continue to grow the impact staff can have on themselves, their colleagues and their students. The ultimate objective for any district initiative is that dedicated time during staff development to provide teachers training with opportunities to learn and grow from each other will eventually impact student learning.

With every initiative, there are staff members that have a different mindset or opinion than the district and/or administration. The importance of the board policy becomes important for these people. It is no longer seen as something new that is being

done as a priority of a certain administrator, but rather something that is valued by the district to better themselves and their students.

Economic Analysis

There are policies that have little or limited financial implications for a school district. However, positive psychology practices, when implemented correctly, does come with a cost for the district. District XF, when exploring how to improve school culture and personal well-being, read the book *Happiness Advantage* by Shawn Achor (2011). His book explains not only the significance of positive psychology practices in individual's daily lives but provides specific strategies that can be implemented each day that will begin to change the emotional state of our brains to be more positive. "When we are happy- when our mindset and mood are positive-we are smarter, more motivated, and thus more successful" (Achor, 2011, p.37). Along with his research, he partnered up with the International Thought Leaders Network (ITLN) which provides workshops to businesses and schools to begin the transformation into a positive emotional state. The intellectual property and instructional materials that accompany these workshops have a significant one-time cost. The work started by Achor and ITLN after the initial implementation can be continued with consultation from ITLN. The cost after the initial implementation at the district level is for providing stipends to staff that will be conducting trainings, substitute pay for trainings during the school year and cost for materials for continued implementation. District XF has been fiscally responsible for almost 20 years allowing them to not only a balanced budget but to also be debt free. Due to this, the cost for the Happiness Implementation was included in the yearly budget for instruction. Districts that are not in the same financial state will either have to change the

training process to limit the amount of release time for teachers or work with their grant writers to apply for additional funds to support the well-being of their employees. I am recommending using the materials, resources and workshops outlined above as the curriculum for positive psychology practices for the staff.

Social Analysis

In the 2017-2018 school year, District XF, formed a Strategic Planning Task Force comprised of teachers, administrators, cabinet members, and community members to review and reflect on the current district goals as well as the strategic plan to meet these goals. Throughout this process, the concern for students' social emotional states become a major theme. Through reflection and discussion, one of the district's three main goals shifted from an academic focus to a social emotional focus. Research supports the need for social-emotional lessons for students: "According to epidemiological studies in the United States, nearly 1 in every 10 children has a depressive episode before their 14th birthday, and as many as 20% of 16-17 year old adolescents have some form of an anxiety or mood disorder or some form of a disruptive or substance use disorder" (Shoshani and Steinmetz, 2014, p. 1290). As a result of this statistic and other similar facts, our new objective is:

We will ensure the success of the whole child by providing comprehensive approaches and programming, grounded in the belief that each child deserves to be Healthy, Safe, Engaged, Supported and Challenged.

Not only is the wellbeing of children important; it is also important for our employees. The literature thus states that, "while much of the increased awareness about the

importance of wellbeing in schools is focused on improving student wellbeing, there are mounting calls for attending to teacher wellbeing as a priority for its own right”

(Cherkowski, 2018, p. 1).

Along with this new goal, an area of the strategic plan focuses on recruitment, development, and engagement of exceptional personnel and utilizing professional development and professional learning communities to enhance instructional practices and school culture. Enhancing school culture to retain exceptional personnel should not be done without a specific plan. The plan includes positive psychology principles at the building and district level. A structured plan for professional development both at the district and building levels allows staff and building administrators to use their discretion to incorporate activities and lessons throughout the school year to boost school culture and staff relationships. These activities occur before, during and after school in a variety of ways and vary from a staff only focus, to a staff/student and community involvement focus.

Political Analysis

The positive psychology practices policy would be implemented to prioritize the social- emotional state of all district staff. The guiding principles provide research and strategies for people to implement into their lives to make space each day to become more positive. Research demonstrates that mindsets in a more positive state result in greater productivity and people more fully engaged in their daily lives. More positive and productive teachers should form stronger relationships with students and see higher levels of academic success in the classroom and beyond. In a study conducted by Howell

(2014), teachers that engaged in daily recognition of gratitude regarding their students observed an increase in positive interactions with students as well as a better general inner attitude regarding their students. These increased social interactions not only change attitudes but strengthen relationships. “Not only did gratitude strengthen teacher-student relationships but it also has spin-off effects in regards to their colleagues. Encouraging one another more, expressing more gratitude to each other, working collaboratively and supporting each other” (Howell, 2014, p. 65). When positive psychology principles are implemented in schools, teacher to teacher relationships are improved, which helps to improve overall school culture.

With the implementation of positive psychology principles in District XF, across the district we have seen higher levels of enjoyment and connectivity. In each of the schools, including the district office, there have been staff members that are skeptical of positive psychology practices. They either believe they are already happy and do not need additional support or they do not believe it should be a focus area at the district level. This would be a concern for the district as they move forward with a positive psychology/school culture policy. In addition to the skepticism of a few District XF staff employees, there is a substantial financial commitment to the partnership and implementation of the positive psychology principles of Achor along with the ITLN Network. District XF’s School Board voted to commit to the fiscal costs that come with this work after many board conversations and meetings with our superintendent and cabinet members. The board is committed to investing in the social-emotional growth of students and staff. The district also researched alternative options with a social-emotional

focus for staff, but were unable to find a curriculum and a partnership that would be able to grow together to meet the needs of the district over time.

The Aspen Institute of Research has found that for social-emotional programs to be successful with students, teachers and administrators need to be trained in the skills that they will be teaching their students. While conducting this research, The Aspen Institute found improvements in teachers overall well-being, reducing teacher stress, and reducing burnout levels therefore decreasing the turnover rate in schools and districts (Jones and Kahn, 2017). When the development of individuals, students or teachers, is a priority in any organization's culture, the impact can be significant.

Most staff in a business, school, or organization would find that even though there is a time and financial commitment of this policy, the total benefit of more positivity in both work and personal life is a great opportunity for each individual employee.

Legal Analysis

Each school in District XF has their own traditions and practices that focus on creating and sustaining strong relationships and positive school culture. These activities and traditions can align with the positive psychology practices, workshops, lessons and activities that will be consistent across all schools. The activities and lessons can be altered to meet the needs of each school's staff and enrich the work they have already embarked on previously. The implementation of positive psychology principles in all schools in District XF thus far has been focused primarily on staff. In each building, there have been teachers that have begun to incorporate these practices and activities with their students during their social-emotional learning time. Even though District XF has not encountered this so far, I believe that some parents might wonder whether we are

entering into a more spiritual approach with our mindset related to joy, gratitude, meditation, and acts of kindness. They might believe this is too closely connected with some of the principles of the religious organizations such as love, peace, karma and happiness for all. In order to address parental concerns, District XF will need to create an informative document that highlights the work of researchers related to current mental health statistics, the brain and the effects a positive state has on happiness, energy, productivity, and efficiency. These benefits will be connected to the educational improvements that students could experience with their mental health, in the classroom, on their assessments and on their peer relationships throughout their educational career. The district will also offer parent educational classes once per year at the start of the year to provide parents with a foundational understanding of the practices and how they can help support their child and even incorporate these practices into their family routines. For greater understanding at the parental level of the work that District XF has embarked on for their staff and eventually students, awareness and education for the parents must occur.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

We live in a world where many children and adults suffer from mental illness. In a study by Seligman, more than 20% of young children suffer from mental illness (Seligman, 2009). In addition, The National Alliance on Mental Illness reported that one in every five adults will suffer from a mental illness in any given year (Any Mental Illness (AMI) Among Adults, 2019). Additional research conducted by The National Institute of Mental Health rated suicide as the second leading cause of death for people ages 10-34 and the fourth leading cause of death for people between the ages of

35-54 (National Institutes of Mental Health, 2018). It is our moral obligation as businesses, organizations, and schools to focus on the mental health and social emotional well-being of our staff. Focusing on the social emotional status of employees can have a significant impact not only on them as individuals but on the school culture and the relationships formed with colleagues, students, and parents. Emphasizing positive psychology practices to monitor school culture should increase productivity and overall satisfaction. Teacher expectations and responsibilities are always increasing, and thus finding time to support and celebrate together is extremely important. Positive psychology practices can help eliminate stress and burnout in a time when the workload of teachers is continuing to increase and the importance of high stakes test results is at an all-time high. Healthier teachers will be able to truly focus on how to improve their craft as opposed to crossing off items on their task list.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships

Positive mindset for some people can be viewed as a personal choice. When discussing positive mindset and positive psychology, there are staff who believe that they are already positive and do not need to focus on this each day, or others who believe this is not something that a workplace should be spending their time on. However, the exposure to positive psychology practices during staff development and other district workshops will be provided to all staff and, staff can decide on their level of depth and commitment. These practices will not be tied at all to staff evaluations and evaluating their professional interactions will be evidently the same as past practices in section 4F, Showing Professionalism, in the Danielson Framework. The goal of implementing

positive practices through staff development and whole staff workshops is to expose them to the content. It will be up to each individual staff member to decide what they will continue or disregard for themselves. Because it is not part of the evaluation process, time will be given for self-reflection without any specific monitoring from district or building administration. This practice is similar to any other professional development opportunities staff are provided over the course of the school year; however, other academic strategies might be an expectation and monitored through the Domain 3, Instruction, in the Danielson Framework.

Throughout each school, common language has been used with our staff throughout the trainings and through natural conversations, it has been brought into messages to our community. This has sparked a natural curiosity within the community and many administrators have had subsequent conversations and meetings to discuss this work with community members. This is again, not a requirement, but an organic effect of this implementation. We have and will continue to invite our key community members such as board members, business partnerships, and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) presidents to trainings related to positive psychology in an attempt to spread the work we have committed to do with teachers out to the community. Another significant relationship the staff has is with our students. Many staff that are passionate about positive mindset have begun to implement components of this work with the students in their classrooms. They have implemented daily acts of gratitude, mediation, physical activity, journaling, and conscious acts of kindness into their classroom activities. Naturally, these activities have been shared with the parents of the students and many have continued this work at home. It is important to share with students, parents and staff

the impact positive practices can have on their lives so they can begin to see changes in their mental and physical health.

Each building, has implemented a Happiness Committee, that focuses on how to bring positive psychology into aspects and activities that the buildings participate in. These changes have been as small as writing inspirational quotes on bathroom walls to whole school family nights that focus on the components of positive psychology. The ideas and activities generated from the Happiness Committee in each building are again subject to personal interest from the teacher. A key idea from Shawn Achor is that happiness is a choice and we will provide our teachers the tools, but it will be their choice on how they choose to have it impact their daily lives and the lives of the students that are in their classrooms.

Conclusion

It is recommended that a policy be created to incorporate positive psychology practices into each school for teachers and district office for the district staff to enhance the positivity, engagement and satisfaction for individuals, schools and communities.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In the education field, the social-emotional education of students is a top priority; however, the social-emotional wellbeing of adults is equally as important both personally and in the workplace. The National Alliance on Mental Health reported that one in every five adults experience mental illness each year and one in every six children ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder within one year (NAMI, 2019). With the growing need for social-emotional support and personal development in the United States, I

recommend that school districts implement a positive psychology program to meet the needs of their employees.

District XF has observed success with the whole district implementation of a social- emotional program for their employees. This program allowed for consistent professional development both at the district level and at the individual school buildings. Prior to the 2016-2017 school year, the district valued school culture but they allowed site-based decisions on how each building would focus on improving their overall school culture. This was dependent on the building administrators' level of interest and comfort in when doing so. There were significant discrepancies in overall satisfaction ratings from school to school. According to Cherkowski (2018), "In flourishing schools, educators laugh a lot. They feel a sense of care and love for their colleagues, and a feeling of pride in their group." These schools have also been identified as having collaborative structures, strong caring relationships, compassions for each other and their students as well as environments that encourage risk-taking and seeing failure as a success (Cherkowski, 2018). These attributes have been identified and enhanced in the schools in District XF through their work with positive psychology and mindset. The principles of positive psychology, outlined in the book *Happiness Advantage*, as well as the partnership with the ITLN Network is an ideal program. The work that District XF has embarked on in the 2017-2018 school year focused on positive psychology principles, district-wide workshops, and follow-up lessons that are embedded into individual schools' staff development plan for the school year. District XFs HUMANeX scores after just one year of implementation increased from 85% to 89% of highly

satisfied and highly engaged employees. I believe that this 3% increase can be attributed to the intentional and specific work lead by the district related to positive psychology.

Throughout this journey for District XF, I had the pleasure and opportunity to be a trainer that participated in training the entire district and part of the administrative team that created the subsequent lessons to be utilized with staff during staff development. As a building principal, I created a team of teachers that examined needs of the building in the areas of staff activities, school decorations, staff presentations, and community outreach. This team modified the district lessons to meet the needs of the building staff. I feel that the autonomy to adapt the lessons to make them unique to each individual building allowed the administration and teachers to capitalize on knowledge they have of their staff and match the lessons to what they know their staff needs.

Throughout this process, I have had the opportunity to observe a change implemented and sustained across an entire district centered on positive psychology. It was powerful to see how a program and curriculum was modified the needs of the individual schools. I believe that adapting to change was a large lesson that I was able to see first-hand when talking with other administrators and our teachers informally and through the interview process. With a district of over 2,000 employees, there is no single program that is going to meet the needs of our entire staff. It is extremely important for a district to be able to specify what is tight and loose for all initiatives and then allow the implementation to take shape at school sites to match the needs of that building. This is similar to teaching a differentiated curriculum to our students, adjusts need to be made, in order to meet the students at their learning level. Through monthly conversations with other administrators at our general administrator meetings, I was able to discern there

were clear differences related to the pace of the rollout, the lessons that were taught and the buy-in from their staff. Acknowledging there is a difference from school to school, a system to monitor each school should be and was put in place by District XF. These structures were all created during the planning process and were not an afterthought. The overarching lesson for change that will be sustained over time is to have a clear vision, allow for autonomy within individual sites, and have a system to monitor effectiveness to make the necessary changes for future years.

The other key leadership lesson that I learned through this process was to truly listen to your staff. There are many times where our own personal goals and interests can overpower the vision and goals for the school year. For true change and progress to occur, staff needs a voice in the direction and supports a building or district is headed. Ongoing opportunities need to be created to allow staff to openly and honestly share their feedback and ideas for improvement. Throughout this process, these processes were in the form of surveys, informal conversations and a committee that was created to solely sustain positive psychology practices within the building. Asking for and receiving feedback and allowing that feedback to drive the direction of the program is crucial because all voices need to be heard and valued.

Creating and sustaining change through feedback and reflection from all stakeholders has reaffirmed my practices as an administrator. Our school is founded on collaboration and communication and continuous improvement. Ongoing feedback is received throughout the course of the year to address the building vision and goals that were created collectively and monitored monthly by my school leadership team. We have honest conversations related to our instruction, mindset, and relationships and create

action steps to address the needs that arise throughout the school year. I witnessed this process on a larger scale as part of the Happiness Advantage team in District XF and as a member of the Happiness Advantage committee in my building. We were all in the process together with the common understanding to better ourselves and our students.

There are many individuals in society today researching, speaking and consulting about culture. Daniel Coyle, George Casas, Daniel Pink, Henry Cloud, Shawn Achor to name a few. In many of their books that I have read, the change starts with yourself. A positive mindset will not come to those that do not put in the work. In the words of Dr, Henry Cloud, “culture is the combination of what we allow and what we create.” What are we allowing ourselves to put out there to our families, our students, our schools and communities and what are we holding them accountable for as well. I empower everyone to work to find inner happiness and let that spread to all of the individuals we come in contact with each day. Happiness is truly our own choice!

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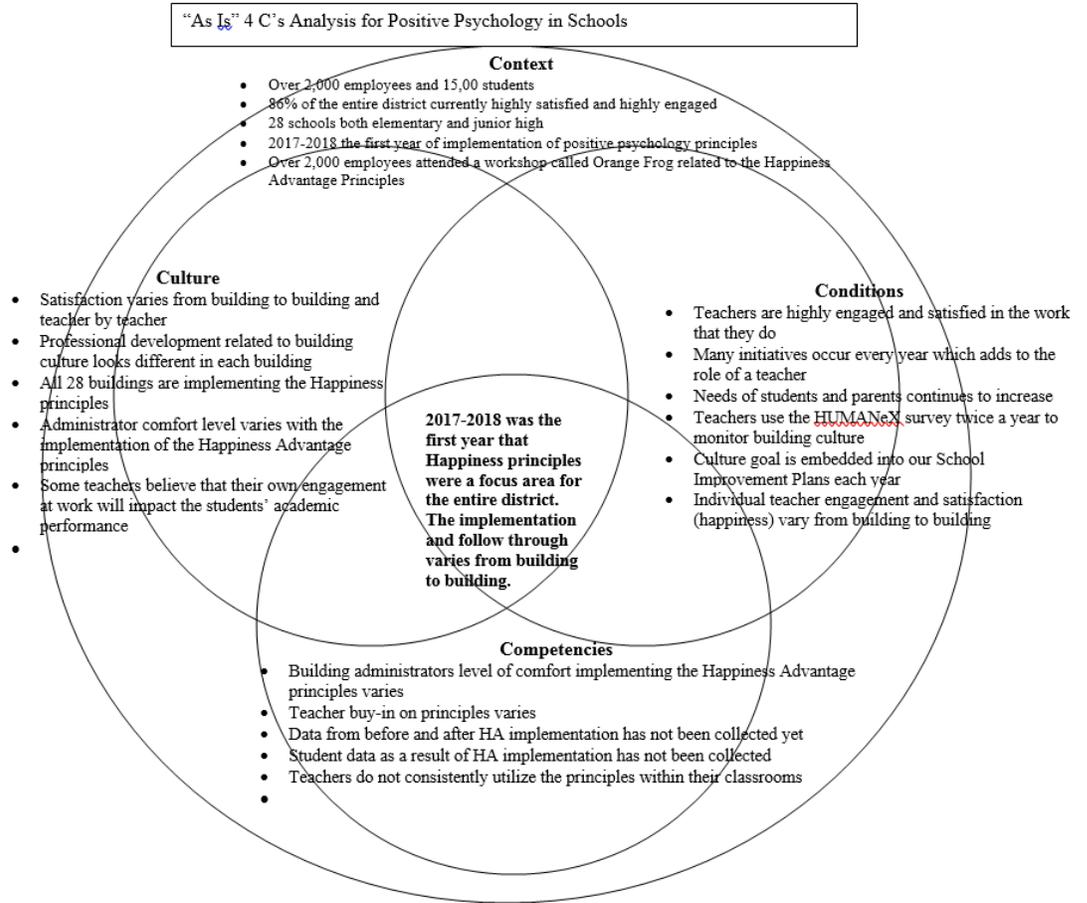
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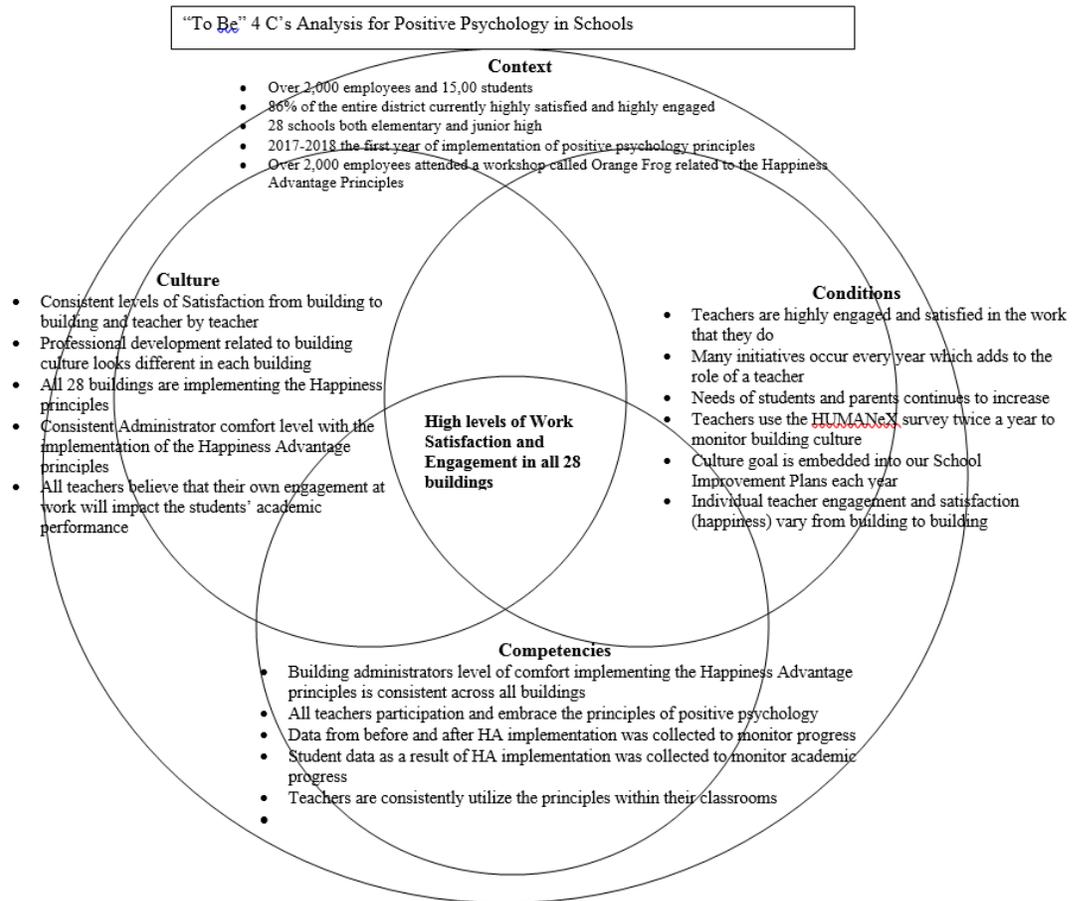
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Appendix A: As-Is 4Cs Analysis of Positive Psychology in Schools



Appendix B: To-Be 4Cs Analysis of Positive Psychology in Schools



Appendix C: Focus Group Informed Consent

My name is Jillian Sagan, and I am a doctoral student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, **“Happiness Advantage and the Impact on School Culture”**, taking place from January 2018-May 2018. The purpose of this study is to understand how the focus on positive psychology in the workplace affects the overall school culture. This study will help researchers develop a deeper understanding of how best to support educators to be highly engaged and satisfied in their work so that student achievement improves. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Jillian Sagan, doctoral student at National Louis University, Chicago.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the implementation of positive psychology strategies within in schools *not* to evaluate your building practices. Participation in this study will include:

- One focus group meeting in the spring of the 2018 school year.
- The focus group will last up to 45-60 min. and include approximately 10 questions to understand how implementing the Happiness Advantage has impacted your individual school culture.
- Focus groups will be recorded and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. The results of this study may be published but participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only Jillian Sagan will have access to data. The documents will be shredded within 5 years after completion of the study.

There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Further, the information gained from this study could be useful to the Jillian Sagan and other schools and school districts looking to implement the Happiness Advantage or positive psychology within their schools or district.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, jilliansagan@sdXF.org to request results from this study.

In the event that you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, jilliansagan@sdXF.org or xxx-xxx-xxxx.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact my doctoral advisor, Geri Chesner email: geri.chesner@nl.edu or the co-chair of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board:

email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix D: Staff Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with the implementation of the Happiness Advantage at your school.
2. How has the Happiness Advantage affected you personally?
3. How has the Happiness Advantage affected you professionally?
4. Tell me about how it has changed your teaching practices.
5. How have you seen the Happiness Advantage program change your school this school year?
6. Have you seen any impact on your students' achievement? Please describe.
7. What conscious changes have you made in your professional life after you participated in the Orange Frog training? What have been the benefits and implications of these changes?
8. (Additional Question) Are there any other issues related to positive psychology principles with a school that we have not addressed? Is there anything else that I should consider in my study of Happiness Advantage and how it affected school culture in our district?

Appendix E: Administrator Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me about your experience with the implementation of the Happiness Advantage at your school.
2. How has the Happiness Advantage affected you personally?
3. How has the Happiness Advantage affected you professionally?
4. Tell me about how it has changed your leadership practices.
5. In what ways and to what extent, have you seen a change in your teachers and their level of engagement and satisfaction at work?
6. In what ways and to what extent, have you seen the Happiness Advantages program take shape in your classrooms and with the community?
7. How have you seen the Happiness Advantage program change your school this school year?
8. Have you seen any impact on your students' achievement? Please describe.
9. What have been the most significant benefits from the implementation of the Happiness Advantage program? What have been the most significant challenges when implementing the Happiness Advantage program?
10. (Additional Question) Are there any other issues related to positive psychology principles with a school that we have not addressed? Is there anything else that I should consider in my study of Happiness Advantage and how it affected school culture in our district?

Appendix F: Focus Group Invitation Email

Dear Teachers and Administrators,

Your help is needed! I am conducting a program evaluation of the school district's implementation of the Happiness Advantage and how it has affected overall school culture across the district. You may remember completing the Orange Frog surveys at the end of your one day training. I will be reviewing this data but would like to add some additional qualitative data to provide greater context and depth to those survey results after further implementation at the building level.

You are invited to participate in a focus group interview that I will be leading. It should last approximately 45-60 minutes. I am interested in documenting diverse perspectives on the positive psychology principles and identifying important patterns across grade levels and school buildings within the district.

The school focus groups will consist of 5 to 6 staff members (classroom teacher, support staff, related services). The administrator focus group will consist of 5 to 6 administrators (principals and assistant principals).

Please let me know if you are willing to participate by responding to me directly. If you are selected, I will provide you with an informed consent form and a meeting date/time. Please be assured that your identity and interview responses will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms and alphanumeric labels will be used on all transcripts. Recordings and transcript will be held on my password-protected laptop and destroyed at the conclusion of my study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jillian Sagan
Principal