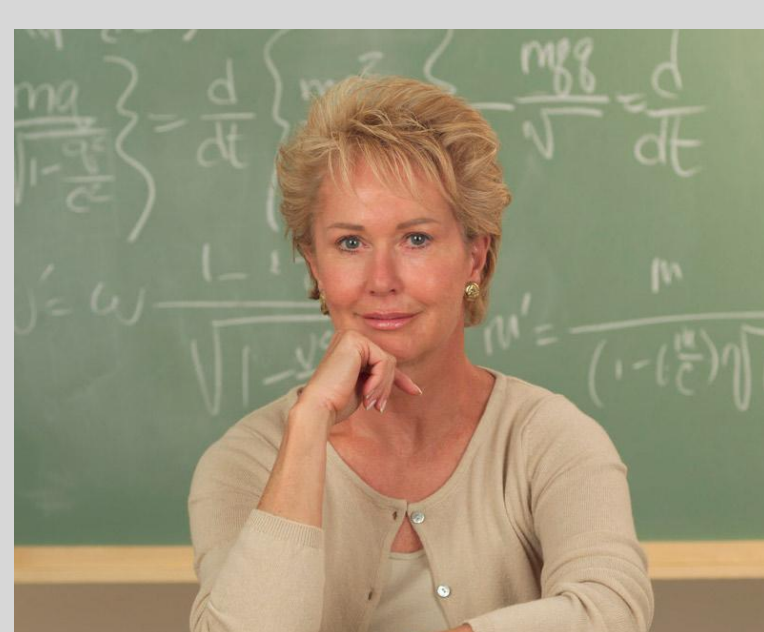


## An Alternative to Measuring Up

Faced with external demands on what to teach, how to teach, and how to work with diverse stakeholders, (Morrison, 2005) professional development in educational settings typically focuses on fixing perceived deficits, and rarely focuses on strengths or how to prioritize change efforts.



The growing field of positive psychology has great potential to employ an alternative to the “fix the blame/fix the problem” approach of the deficit model of school change.

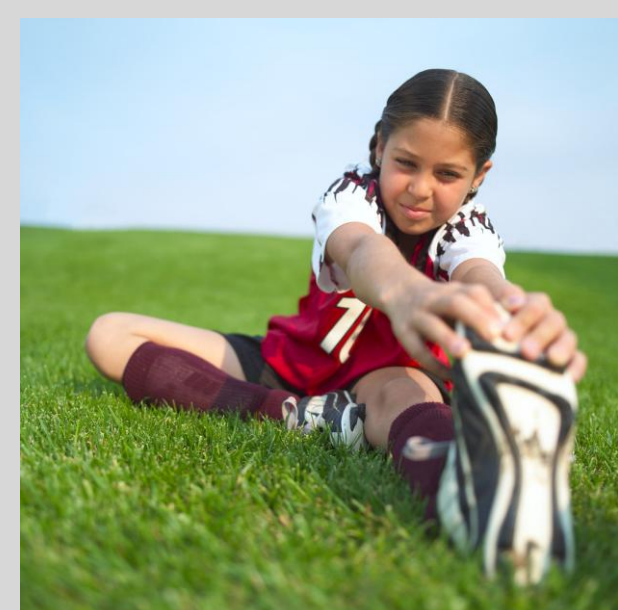
## Positive Psychology Research

Helps all people lead richer, fuller lives through the study of



positive individual strengths and virtues

positive subjective experience



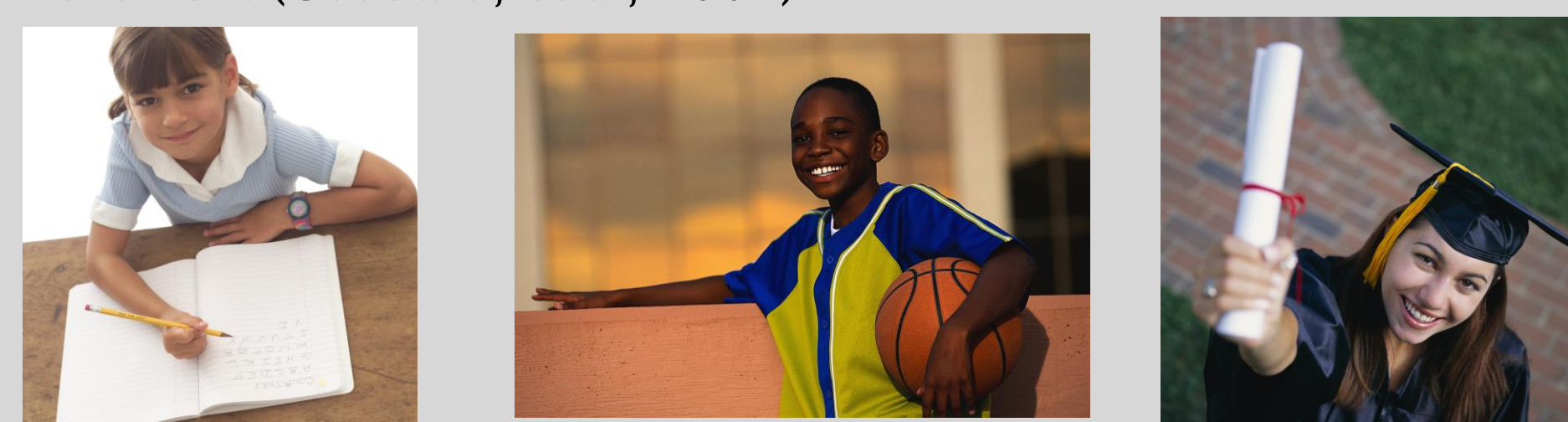
positive institutions and communities

## Our Research: Abstract

Teachers in a large, non-urban school system completed one or more positive psychology questionnaires assessing strengths of character; happiness; orientation toward pleasure, engagement, and meaning as three different paths to happiness; explanatory style; orientation toward teaching as a job, a career, or a calling; and job satisfaction. The results of these 170 participants were compared with those obtained from an Internet sample of 2,538 teachers on four of the same instruments. Correlations between the results for each of the two samples are examined. The resulting profiles of the two samples were compared, and suggestions are made as to possible uses of such data to guide improvement in large school systems.

## Some Relevant Findings In Positive Psychology

- Positive school climate predicts teacher and student satisfaction, lower stress levels, and better school results (Sangsue and Vorpe, 2000)
- Happiness increased among people who have learned to use their signature strengths in new ways (Seligman, et al., 2005).
- Positive Psychology exercises can inoculate both elementary- and college-age students against depression (Reivich, et al., 2005; Seligman, et al., 1999).
- High-quality connections in the workplace strengthen employee attachment, quality of service, and adaptability (Dutton, et al., 2004).
- Faculty collective efficacy significantly influences not only the ways in which teachers approach their work; it also has a direct impact on high school students' verbal, math, and science achievement (Goddard, et al, 2004).



It is likely that happiness causes success, rather than vice versa. (Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005).

## Benefits of Positive Emotion

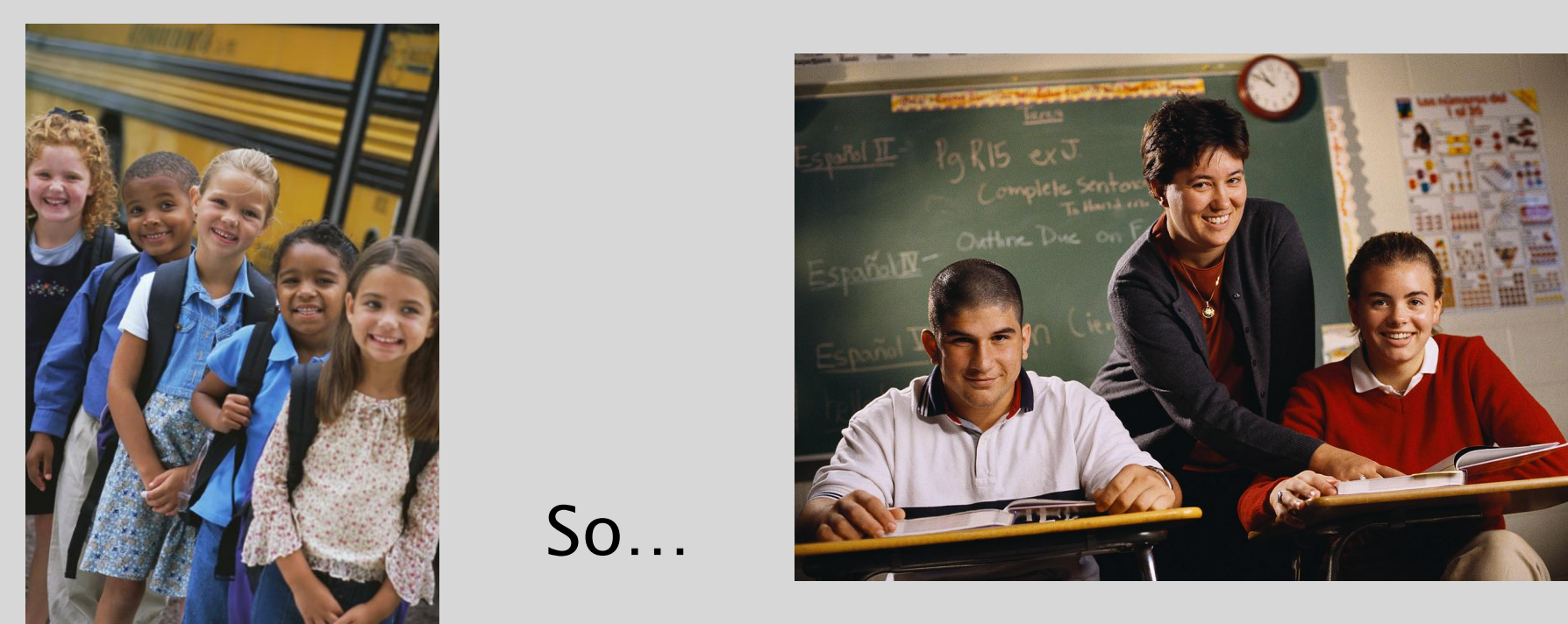
Positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment, pride and love

- broaden an individual's attention, creativity, cognition, and scope of possible action (Fredrickson, 2001).
- may undo the effects of the negative emotions thus protecting health (Fredrickson, 1998),
- increase resilience and resistance to physical illnesses ranging from colds to cardiovascular events (Fredrickson, 1998),
- can spread to others as people share feelings of competence, achievement, involvement, significance, and social connection (Fredrickson, 2003).



## Positive Psychology Goes to School

With public schools positioned as community institutions with funding, staffing and direct connections to children, families and existing as positive developmental settings (Eccles and Gootman, 2002; Clonan, et al., 2004), schools could have an enormous impact on promoting the well-being of children and educators.



So...

Can the concepts and findings of positive psychology be introduced into a school system in a fashion that will achieve acceptance with a significant percentage of teachers?

## Method

**Purpose of the Study:** Develop a positive psychology baseline for an actual school system.

- Monitor effectiveness and effects of a no-pressure, informational, research-study approach to introducing concepts of positive psychology in a large, non-urban school system during a three-semester period ending June 2007 using an internet portal with access to positive psychology assessments and information.
- Provide personal, strength-based information for educators, as well as beginnings of a foundation in positive psychology while also providing an appealing, low-impact introduction to positive psychology focused primarily on self-awareness.



- Keep it low-impact: Any resulting changes in teaching are the contribution, not the requirement, of teachers.
- Compare results to an on-line sample of teachers from the U.S. who have taken some of the same questionnaires.

## Questionnaires Used

**Authentic Happiness Inventory:** a new 24-item measure of general happiness including general life satisfaction, feelings about oneself, enjoyment of day-to-day experience, and optimism for the future (Peterson, Park, Steen and Seligman, 2006).

**Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire:** measures the degree to which the respondent derives happiness from pleasure, engagement, or meaning (Peterson, Park, and Seligman, 2005).

**Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire (SASQ):** is a measure of optimism, persistence and resilience consisting of six good and six bad hypothetical events for which the respondent generates a causal explanation.

**VIA (Values in Action) Signature Strengths Survey:** is a 240-item test that rank orders a person's 24 strengths of character (Peterson and Seligman, 2004).

**Work-Life Questionnaire:** operationalizes the extent to which a person views their work as a job (focus on financial rewards, necessity of work), a career (focus on advancement and future success), or a calling (focus on socially valuable and fulfilling work) (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997).

## Results

As compared to the national on-line sample of teachers, our school system's teachers were:

- happier (3.48 to 3.18, AHI)
- more spiritual (4.23 to 3.80, VIA)
- more hopeful (3.98 to 3.73, VIA)
- more modest (3.79 to 3.54, VIA)
- more diligent (3.96 to 3.74, VIA)
- more zestful (3.84 to 3.69, VIA)
- and more satisfied with their work (5.65 to 4.74, Work-Life).



On the other hand, compared to the national on-line sample of teachers, the school system teachers were:

- less prone to say they are often very engaged in what they do ( 3.10 to 3.16, Approaches)
- more inclined to say they find meaning in life (4.02 to 3.82, Approaches)
- less creative (3.66 to 3.79, VIA)
- and much less inclined to see their work as just a job (0.65 to 1.06, Work-Life).

**Demographic information included:**

- The system's teachers were 90.4% female and 49.4% had a master's degree or higher.
- The national sample of teachers was 81.4% female and 62% had a master's degree or higher.
- The age distribution for both groups was an unsurprising normal distribution with the 35-44 category as the modal response.



## Future Directions

Make positive psychology in schools important to systems by connecting it to what matters to them:

- Build the structure of the relationship between positive psychology and teachers, students, schools, parents, and communities.
- Investigate links between constructs such as happiness, explanatory style, and calling with data on absenteeism for teachers, attrition for new teachers and, ultimately, teacher effectiveness.

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