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# Happiness in US Schools: Students' Subjective Well-Being as a Part of School Improvement Planning

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# Happiness in US Schools: Students' Subjective Well-Being as a Part of School Improvement Planning

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LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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GEORGIA SOUTHERN  
UNIVERSITY

# Dodge Ram Passenger Van as an “In-Between Space”



# What knows the US Public Educator...

- ▶ Anne @ Breakfast: Refusing to participate in the game of justification for “Non-Academic” domains.
- ▶ Peter et al. (August, 2014): Agency & Contributor
- ▶ Paul Care: Are my efforts helpful or hindering? e.g., does my quantification of SWB/Happiness somehow dilute.

# School Improvement Processes in United States' Public PK-12

- ▶ No Child Left Behind Act (2001)
- ▶ Requirement to document, “Adequate Yearly Progress”
- ▶ School Improvement Plan (SIP)
  - Recognized Nationally & Locally (State-level)  
*(Dunaway, Kim, & Szad, 2012; Fernandez, 2011)*
- ▶ Business/Productivity Model
- ▶ Expansion of Domains Measured
  - Building off of Reading, Math & Science



# School Improvement Plan (SIP)

## School Improvement Plan 2014-15

School Name: CA Sink Elementary School

Principal: Mr. Richard Cleveland

Date: August 21, 2014

Subject: READING

### Assessment Target:

State standardized assessment target will be: 64.7 + 1.88 = 66.58 percent of students meeting or exceeding standard in all subject strands.

### S.M.A.R.T. GOAL:

Improve students' ability in subject area/strands by: focusing on improving comprehension skills, both literary and informational.

from September 2014 through June 2015.

[Remember: SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely]

S.M.A.R.T. Processes					S.M.A.R.T. Results	
Instructional Leadership Plan		Resources			Evidence of Implementation	Evidence of Impact
Instructional Practices	Schedule of Activities	PLC/Team Involved	Materials/Resources Needed	Budget Required	Are we working our plan? <i>What are educators doing?</i>	Is our plan working? <i>What are students doing?</i>
Continue K-2 daily five implementation with alignment to intermediate reading program.	K-2 teachers share Daily 5 to intermediate staff at staff meeting before winter break.	Entire K-2 staff. Entire staff for meeting.	Purchase of second book and resource guide.	\$65.00	Continued participation in D5 support group. Reading specialist providing continual in-service support.	Students actively engaged in D5 activities while teachers conduct guided reading.





# Presence of School Climate in the School Improvement Plan (SIP)

- ▶ Expansion of Domains Measured
  - Reading, Math & Science ⇒ inclusion of School Climate
- ▶ School Climate Initially Operationalized as:
  - Truancy, Discipline, Suspensions
- ▶ Easily Quantifiable & Deficits-Oriented  
*(Bulach et al., 1997; Klein et al., 2012)*



# School Climate

- ▶ Lack of consensus regarding definition of School Climate
- ▶ National School Climate Center Definition
  - 135 words, referring to further elaboration via 12 dimensions
- ▶ “School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. [...] A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society.”

*(National School Climate Center website, August 2014)*

# School Climate

- ▶ Two emerging components:
  1. Assessing positive rather than deficits-based aspects/outcomes
  2. Incorporating subjective student perceptions  
*(Cocorada & Clinciu, 2009' Ding, Liu, & Berkowitz, 2011)*
  
- ▶ Towards a More Positive Outlook: Zulig, Huebner, & Patton (2011)
  - Students' Perceived Quality of Life (PQOL)
  - Subjective + Objective indicators = Comprehensive

# Instruments Assessing Students' Subjective Perceptions

- ▶ School Leaders continue to employ homemade instruments
  - Confusion surrounding definition of school climate
  - Pressures applied via state/federal policies
  - Paucity of psychometrically sound instruments

*(Adelman & Taylor, 2011; MMS Education, 2006; Zulig et al., 2010)*

# Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

- ▶ SWB is composed of a set of affective and cognitive appraisals evaluating an individual's life (i.e., How good does my life feel? Does my life meet my expectations? How desirable is my life?, etc.)  
*(Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 2000; Veenhoven, 1997)*
- ▶ Three factors commonly attributed to identifying SWB and, by proxy happiness, are **frequent and intense states of positive affect**, an **average level of global life satisfaction**, and the **relative absence of negative feelings** such as anxiety and depression.  
*(Kashdan, 2004; Robbins, Francis, & Edwards, 2010)*

# Overview of Research Study

## ▶ **Sample**

- 428 Students grade 4-6 enrolled in private faith-based schools in Washington State, USA

## ▶ **Method**

- 2 instruments were administered in the classroom setting by teachers

## ▶ **Analysis**

- ▶ Statistical analysis: *Can the two samples be aggregated?*
- ▶ Factor Analysis: *Do the 2 instruments retain factor structure?*

# Subjective Well-Being Instruments

- ▶ Oxford Happiness Questionnaire – Short Form (OHQ-SF)
  - Hills & Argyle (2002)
  - Single items requiring a Likert-scale response
  - 8 items theorized as unidimensional
  
- ▶ Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)
  - Lyubomirsky & Lepper (1999)
  - Single items requiring a Likert-scale response
  - 4 items theorized as unidimensional

# Results of Research Study

- ▶ 2 data sets merged for  $N = 428$ 
  - Degree of normality of the 2 samples within tolerable limits
- ▶ Exploratory Factor Analyses found both instruments retaining theorized unidimensionality
  - EFA PAF with oblique rotations if necessary
  - OHQ-SF 33.95% of shared variance
  - SHS 38.69% of shared variance
  - *\*Remembering scoring changes, and slight wording changes*

# Limitations

- ▶ Sampling
  - Elementary school age (4, 5, 6 grades) in two private schools
  - Student populations predominantly white
- ▶ Instrument Administration
  - Minimum researcher footprint
  - Mistake in administration at 1 site resulted in exclusion of grade 3



# Recommendations for Future Research

- ▶ Increased Diversity in Samples
  - (i.e., racial/ethnic identity, SES, family structure, etc.)
- ▶ Correlational and Multiple Regression Analyses
  - Exploring convergent and divergent validity
- ▶ Confirmatory Factor Analyses
  - Further verify factor structures and psychometric soundness

# Implications for School Improvement Processes

- ▶ Given growing awareness of school climate impact on academics and federal/state financial incentives has directed School Leader attention to more systemic conceptualization of school climate:
  - OHQ-SF & SHS used to assess subjective indicator of students' perception of school climate
  - Pre/Post, Establishing a baseline, Global Needs Assessment, etc.
  - Results fit quantifiable requirements of SIP templates
  - Start the discussion & work of school climate in a strengths-based rather than deficits-focused manner
- ▶ Student “voice” (dare I say *agency*) in both school climate and school improvement processes

Thank you



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