

## The Happiness Advantage in School District #67

### *Training your brain to see the positive*

Each month, we highlight healthy schools stories. Have a healthy school story to share? DASH wants to hear from you! Click [here](#) to view the Healthy Schools BC Stories Map to read more stories and submit your own.

Recognizing that health is more than just the absence of disease, staff and students in School District #67 have begun to investigate ways to use positive psychology to be more successful in school and relationships, and to be generally happier! Inspired by the work of happiness researcher Shawn Achor, staff and students are participating in a variety of initiatives that promote positive mental health.

Jenny Mitchell, SD #67 Health Promoting Schools Coordinator, attended the Heart and Mind Conference at UBC in May 2013 and was inspired by happiness researcher, Shawn Achor. Shawn presented on his extensive research and highlighted evidence that happiness and optimism actually fuel performance and achievement. His work challenges the notion that, *"If I achieve [set goal], then I will be happy."* Shawn shared valuable research that shows that the brain in a state of positivity functions more effectively.

Positive emotions fill our brain with dopamine and serotonin, supporting the brain to be more thoughtful, creative, and inventive. The brain is more skilled at complex problem solving and can organize and retrieve information more efficiently. The great thing about positive emotion is that it can also be the antidote to stress and anxiety!

Understanding that we see what we look for, SD #67 staff and students are training their brains to see the positive. Staff are engaging in professional development activities and a book study of Shawn Achor's *The Happiness Advantage*. Teachers are putting jokes on the first pages of exams and sharing funny videos before stressful class events. Staff and students are journaling about positive events and writing down things they are grateful for in their lives. Students and staff are making an effort to smile more and say hi in the hallways. They are also practising conscious acts of kindness. Thinking about the act of kindness throughout the day and looking for opportunities to share happiness increases the positive effect on mental health. Staff and students have come to realize that, if we train our brain to see the positive, then we will expect more positive outcomes and be more willing to engage in events and try new activities.

Interested in learning more about the Happiness Project? Check out some links below!

- [Shawn Achor's TED talk](#)
- [Gratitude Activities for the Classroom](#)
- [The Smile Experiment](#)

For more information about the Happiness Project, contact the SD #67 Health Promoting School Coordinator, Jenny Mitchell at [jmitchell@summer.com](mailto:jmitchell@summer.com).