

Implementation

Kern, in an interview with McQuaid, concerned with guiding principles for embedding positive education in schools, remarked, “I wouldn’t say there are specific steps to take but rather key principles and processes to consider” (McQuaid, n.d.). One of the first principles Kern mentioned was that leaders should become familiar with the science of wellbeing. Being familiar with the science, not just the interventions, can help you avoid the trap of “learning just enough positive psychology to be dangerous” (McQuaid). Knowing the science can enable you to direct your efforts so they yield long-lasting change.

Kern recommended leaders involve staff early and often to create shared ownership (McQuaid, n.d.). Driving the wellbeing conversation alone puts a heavy load on a single leader: Change is slower, and wellbeing initiatives are more likely to end when the leader leaves. Consider creating a school leadership team to help facilitate the change process: “As principals strategically leverage ratios and build leaders around them, their energies and efforts will be distributed, multiplied, and improved throughout the school” (Jensen, Boren, & Murphy, 2019). Your school leadership team should include teachers, as they are closest to the students affected by your decisions. Choose teachers who are influential with their colleagues, embrace the school vision, champion your key processes, and think systematically about school needs (Jensen, Boren & Murphy, 2019).

Like wellbeing initiatives, a school’s wellbeing vision should not be driven solely by the principal. A vision co-created with stakeholders, with ownership, not merely buy-in, can survive despite any one leader or individual leaving. As part of creating ownership, give those on your teams meaningful assignments, and make sure there is equality in your meetings (Jensen, Boren & Murphy).

A teacher who isn’t on your leadership team can be engaged as a wellbeing advocate. Shawn Achor’s (2018) research affirmed the importance of creating wellbeing advocates from every seat. He observed, “When we are brave enough to expand power to others, suddenly we find that a huge weight is lifted off our shoulders, increasing our power to lift even heavier loads” (p. 114). You may invite classroom teachers to educate parents about why schools need to foster wellbeing. With parents and teachers engaged, your efforts are more likely to reach every child and to continue. You can accomplish more for your school’s wellbeing as you empower more people to help you in the change process. Allow your enthusiasm to be infectious. Create ownership and empower your faculty, students, and staff to become wellbeing leaders who can share your load and strengthen your efforts.

After enlisting your teams and wellbeing advocates, create a shared vocabulary and vision. Rachel Powell, a business professional and specialist in applied positive psychology advises organizations to begin their efforts at promoting wellbeing by creating a common language. In her organization, Xero, she created a leadership team that worked together to define wellbeing according to their values. This common language helped unite stakeholders with their wellbeing efforts (Powell & McQuaid, date). Similarly, Richard DuFour (2016), an educational researcher specializing in professional learning communities, commented,

It is difficult enough to bring these concepts to life in a school or district when there is a shared understanding of their meaning. It is impossible when there is not common understanding and the terms mean very different things to different people within the same organization (p. 19).

After gathering your wellbeing team, come to a consensus about what wellbeing looks like in your setting. Create a common language based on your values and research-based evidence. Consider using some of the principles of appreciative inquiry as you create your language and goals. Then, use this language often with your teachers, students, and staff. Not only will doing so help unify your efforts, it will also help empower your wellbeing advocates to be a more active part of your clarified purpose.

Section Summary

- Create buy-in and recruit wellbeing leaders from throughout your school.
- Create a common language to unify your definition and vision of wellbeing.

Suggestions for Further Research

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DuFour, R. (2016). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Solution Tree Press.

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Jensen, J. N., Boren, D., & Murphy, T. (n.d.). Soil, water, and weeds: The “how” of the school leadership team. *Impact Journal*. 20(2), 6-12.

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ASSESSING
WELLBEING
IN SCHOOLS

*An Educator's Practical Guide to
Measuring Wellbeing*

MEGAN BATES AND DAVID BOREN



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