Positive Psychology in Education: Fostering Happiness and Relationships at School to Improve Student Outcomes

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Abstract: This workshop will convey best practices for promoting student complete mental health, through positive psychology programs and practices that generate positive emotions and build social-emotional-behavioral competencies. Positive psychology conceptualizes mental health as the presence of strengths, virtues, and happiness. This training will increase participants’ knowledge of how to assess and promote students’ happiness. Evidence-based positive psychology programs and practices across a range of psychological services will be reviewed, including universal (schoolwide and classwide), small-group, and individualized interventions. Participants will learn how to administer, score, and use tools to measure positive psychology constructs, such as life satisfaction and character strengths. Participants will learn specific programs and practices for promoting all children’s happiness through strategies that target improvements in the factors correlated with children’s subjective well-being, including positive teacher-student relationships evident in schools with a healthy climate, as well as students’ personal levels of gratitude, hope, and use of character strengths.

Learning Objectives:

1. Introduction to Positive Psychology: Understanding and Assessing Key Constructs Relevant to Students’ Happiness.

2. Knowledge of key constructs within the field of positive psychology, including subjective well-being (i.e., happiness), character strengths, strong relationships, and how these constructs relate to youth resilience.

3. Knowledge of how to assess positive psychology constructs (i.e., subjective well-being, character strengths) among youth and how to use data from such assessments in (a) universal screenings of student mental health, and (b) progress monitoring and evaluative efforts.

4. Knowledge of how positive psychology fits in with other services in a multi-tiered system of supports for student mental health.

5. Positive Psychology Programs and Practices to Increase Happiness: Knowledge of a time-limited intervention to improve teachers’ happiness and reduce burnout.

6. Knowledge of universal (Tier 1) programs and practices for promoting students’ well-being through schoolwide and classwide prevention efforts that
strengthen relationships, and cultivate positive emotions about the past, present, and future.

7. Knowledge of targeted (Tier 2 and Tier 3) positive psychology interventions for promoting students’ happiness.

Biography: Shannon Suldo, Ph.D., is a Professor in the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida. She received her Ph.D. in School Psychology from the University of South Carolina in 2004. She is a Licensed Psychologist in the state of Florida and continues to provide school-based mental health services to youth in the Tampa area. She has extensive research and clinical experiences in school-based mental health services, including: establishing empirical links between student mental health and academic success; conceptualizing and measuring student mental health in a dual-factor model that considers psychopathology and well-being; evidence-based positive psychology interventions for promoting positive indicators of student well-being; schoolwide strategies to identify youth with mental health problems; and factors that limit and facilitate school psychologists’ provision of school mental health services. She also studies the stress, coping strategies, and mental health of high school students in accelerated courses, and is Principal Investigator of two large federal grant to identify and facilitate student-level and environmental factors that predict academic and emotional success among students in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. She has published more than 60 studies that convey findings from her research on how to assess and promote complete mental health. She is the author of Promoting Student Happiness: Positive Psychology Interventions in Schools, a 2016 book within the Guilford Practical Intervention in the Schools Series.