



Local 698

East Detroit Federation of Teachers
Educators and more since 1942



A Union of Professionals

February 2010 Newsletter

Extra *American Values Campaign* Extra

Pursuit-of-Happiness.org

As a part of our American Values Campaign we have included the notion that being Happy is an important part of what we need to do to be successful in this stressful time. Over the next couple of weeks I will share with you some of the most important and recent scientific information on the topic of happiness that is available. The EDFT has been working to bring to the EDPS a professional development day that will feature teaching strategies that will help you incorporate the pursuit of happiness into your lesson plans, your classroom and your life.

Hidden Epidemic

P-O-H.org

Nearly 20% of US citizens experience some form of depression during their lifetime. Americans are taking so many anti-depressants that, according to the NY Times, the water supplies of major US cities are now contaminated with traces of these drugs. The problem is not limited to adults. The American Psychological Association reports that "as many as 9% of children will experience a major depressive episode by the time they are 14 years old, and 20% will experience a major depressive episode before they graduate from high school.

The organization called Pursuit-of-Happiness has granted us permission to use their research and has agreed to work with us to promote this worthwhile cause in our district. It is our goal to be able to present, in collaboration with the curriculum office, a PD of useful strategies and techniques you can plug into your teaching right away. I encourage you to look up their website and explore the many facets of happiness they address. Our campaign will focus on things more directly pertinent to our goals and visions. The research can be found at pursuit-of-happiness.org. The information presented in this program is not necessarily that of the union or myself, but are the assembled sum of their professional efforts. We will strive to work with them for as long as it takes to help our students and teachers find happiness in our district. I will abbreviate the web site credits to P-O-H.org.

According to the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the "pursuit of happiness" is an essential human right, and yet our schools provide us with few intellectual tools to explore the issue seriously. For many, the pursuit of happiness is a political dream, buried within the Declaration of Independence in the national archives. We hope to change that.

P-O-H.org

Happiness is Understandable, obtainable and teachable

Traditionally psychologists have focused their attention on what makes depressed people depressed. Now they are asking, "What makes happy people happy?" Numerous studies by "positive psychologists" such as Ed Diener and Martin

Seligman have tried to place the science of human well-being on a scientific foundation. They have found that, to a certain extent that people can intentionally generate happiness through their thoughts and actions.

Science of Happiness



Aristotle once said "Happiness is the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence." Finding true happiness is serious business, and as a result, it has become big business. On the internet and in the bookstores, a thousand gurus tout different remedies for human misery. How do we distinguish fact from hype? We need to consult one of our greatest gurus, the scientific method. Over the last twenty years we have seen a dramatic upsurge in scientific studies aimed at discovering the causes of "subjective well being" or to put it simply, discovering what makes happy people happy. Many of the scientific studies point to certain key areas that can

strongly impact our pursuit of happiness. In these pages, we review the most scientific studies, find areas of agreement, and translate the results into non-technical English. Let's take a look at the areas of consensus that are emerging through the new science of happiness.

Seven Science-Based Strategies for Happiness

1. Communicating
2. Caring
3. Exercise
4. Getting in the Flow
5. Spiritual Engagement
6. Cultivating Strengths and Virtues
7. Positive Thinking: Optimism, Savoring, and Gratitude

1. Communicating

The top line: People who have one or more close friendships appear to be happier. It doesn't seem to matter if we have a large network of close relationships or not. What seems to make a difference is if and how often we cooperate in activities and share our personal feelings with a friend or relative. Simply put, it's not the quantity of our relationships, but the quality that matters. In one study people were asked on random occasions about their mood. They were found to be happiest with their friends, followed by family members, and least happy if they were alone (Larson). Another study constructed a scale of cooperativeness, ie how willing people were to constructively engage in activities with others. This study showed that the cooperativeness of an individual was a predictor of their happiness, though it did not conclusively show if their cooperation resulted in happiness or the other way around (Lu). A study on the quality of relationships found that to avoid loneliness people needed only one close relationship coupled with a network of other relationships. To form a close relationship required a growing amount of "self-disclosure," or a willingness to reveal ones personal issues and feelings, and without it people with friends would still be lonely (Weiss). A similar study found that some students who had many friends with whom they often spent time were still plagued by loneliness, and this seemed to be related to their tendency to talk about impersonal topics such as sports and pop music instead of their personal life (Weeler).