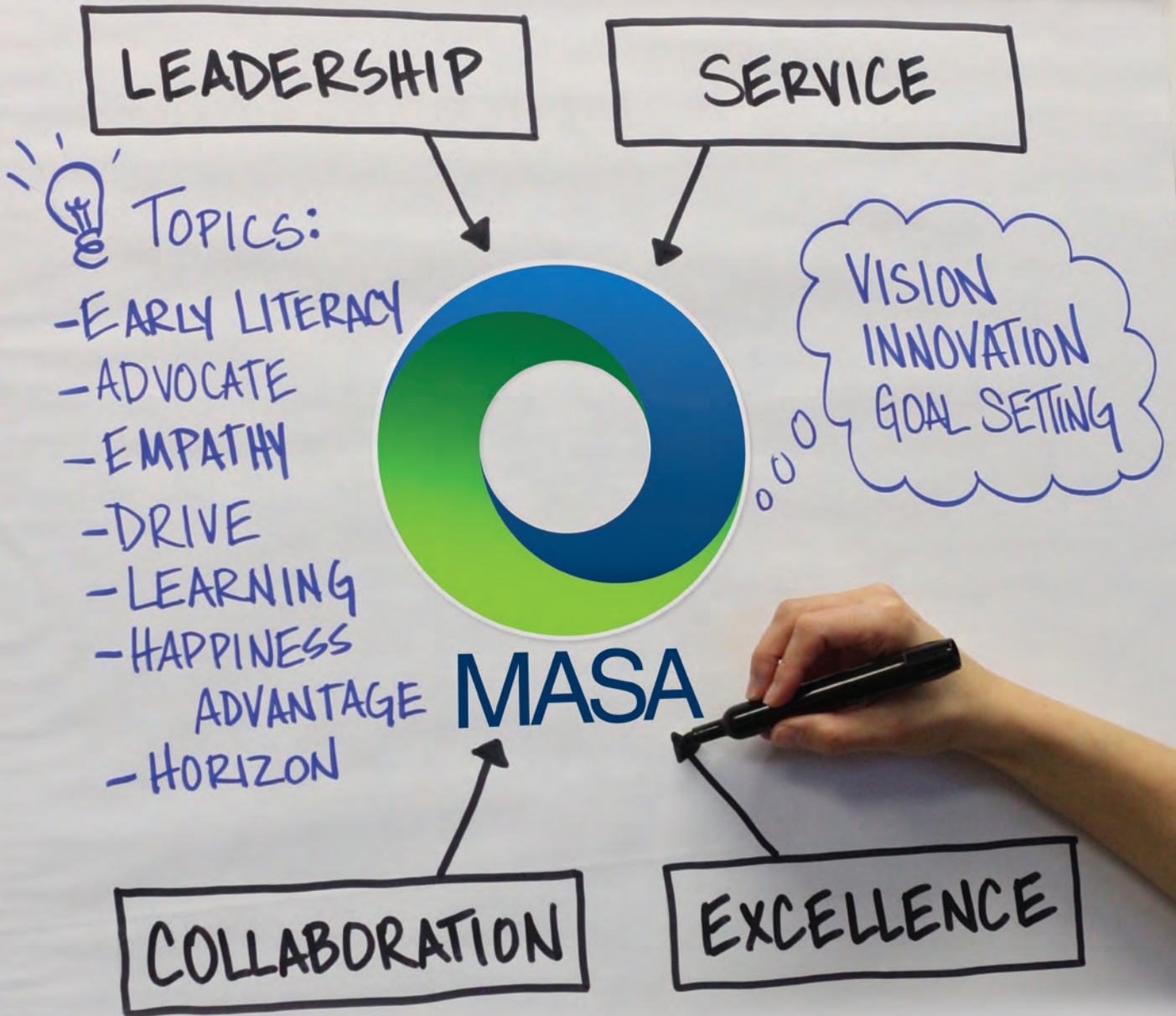


# MASA LEADER

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Developing leadership and unity within our membership to achieve continuous improvement in public education.



## Bringing the Happiness Advantage to Schools

By Dr. Bobby Moore

Teachers and school leaders can cultivate the mindset and behaviors that have been empirically proven to fuel greater success and fulfillment. The old paradigm, “If I am good at my job, my students learn at high levels, and I am highly successful, it will bring me happiness,” has now been debunked by more than a decade of groundbreaking research in the fields of positive psychology and neuroscience.

Carol Dweck’s work on growth mindset has been popular in education, but most of the research has only been applied in the context of teachers fostering a growth mindset in students. We know from John Hattie’s research that when a group of educators develop the mindset that they do, indeed, have a great impact on student learning and that collective efficacy is achieved. Collective efficacy has an effect size of 1.57, much higher than the .4 effect size, which is said to equate to a year’s worth of growth.

Applying the research of positive psychology in our schools is more than telling staff to be happy, focus on the positive aspects of your job, and pretend challenges and obstacles do not exist. To embed these practices, we must relearn some of our behaviors and change some of our mindsets that have had a negative impact on success and fulfillment. As Shawn Achor, author of *The Happiness Advantage: Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work*, explains, “Happiness is not the belief that we don’t need to change. It is the realization that we can. Happiness and optimism are the precursors to success, not merely the result.”

When I first heard Achor’s TED Talk, which has been viewed more than

14 million times, I did not immediately make the connection to how his research could improve schools. I viewed it as an opportunity to work on my own mindsets and behaviors, which hopefully would contribute to my own success and fulfillment. That changed after I saw Achor’s keynote at the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Conference last year in Phoenix, during which he talked about the transformation of Cardinal School District in Iowa. The new superintendent of Cardinal, Joel Pederson, turned around the culture and performance of the district by implementing Achor’s core principles from *The Happiness Advantage*. Read the district’s story in the September issue of AASA School Administrator.

I was excited about the potential of

Achor’s research to help create more positive school cultures, but I was still a little skeptical about how. So, I reached out to Dr. Randy Poe, a former Kentucky Association of School Administrators and Kentucky School Boards Association superintendent of the year, who had also brought *The Happiness Advantage* to Boone County Schools. Over the years, I have come to respect Poe as a leader committed to pedagogy, research, and practice. His district is one of the highest performing in the state of Kentucky, and I frequently bump into him and his staff at national conferences sharing the district’s work.

I asked Poe bluntly, “Why did you choose to implement Shawn Achor’s work in Boone County? Was it really needed, or did it turn out to be a distraction to all the other great things you are doing?”



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He paused for a second to reflect and then said confidently, "Jim Collins (Good to Great, 2001) discussed the importance of getting the right people on the bus; Daniel Pink (Drive, 2009) shared how to keep those people engaged and motivated; and Shawn Achor's work is important because it not only keeps the wheels on the bus, but keeps them moving in the same direction. Culture matters!"

Poe is so committed to the power of positive psychology in schools that he requires all new leaders to develop a 21-day action plan on how they will develop their own mindsets and behaviors (one of Achor's principles). He also clearly communicates to principals that they are responsible for their schools' culture (and results). This conversation confirmed for me the importance of working with leaders and teachers and giving them the tools and resources to own their own happiness.

Next, I had the opportunity to join Dr. Lisa Hagel, superintendent of Michigan's Genesee Intermediate School District, and her staff as they engaged in the Orange

Frog Workshop™, a two-day, experiential workshop developed by the International Thought Leader Network (ITLN) and Achor, which is rooted in the core principles from *The Happiness Advantage*. To serve as a starting point for the workshop, Achor wrote *The Orange Frog*, a parable that illustrates the journey to creating a happier, more productive, more satisfying life and workplace. Witnessing firsthand how the workshop fostered collaboration, trust, and the ownership of important behaviors associated with a healthy school culture, I was excited to share the opportunity with the superintendents and principals that Battelle for Kids works with across the country.

As Achor explains, most people think the science of happiness is useful for the people around them, but the person we have the greatest power to change is ourselves. We have all felt and observed the power of negative emotions in our schools. This negativity can infect a group of people almost instantly. Fortunately, positive emotions are also contagious, which makes them a powerful tool in

our quest for high performance in the workplace. More importantly, the power to spark positive emotions multiplies if you're in a leadership position.

Battelle for Kids is excited to announce an exclusive partnership with ITLN to help bring *The Orange Frog Workshop™* to K-12 education. Learn more at [www.bfk.org/OrangeFrog](http://www.bfk.org/OrangeFrog).

### References

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