

## What Do the Sneaker Company ASICS, Positive Wellbeing Research and School Systems Have in Common?



As it turns out, it is a lot. The Japanese sneaker company name is an acronym that represents five Latin words: “Anima Sana in Corpore Sano”(ASICS) or “A Sound Mind in a Healthy Body.” Immersed in the coursework for the *Certificate in Applied Positive Psychology* from *The Flourishing Center in New York City* for the past seven months, I found myself struck by the research and its connection to my recent workout at my local wellness center. Yes, I was wearing a pair of ASICS running shoes. I am a firm believer that a “sound mind and healthy body” reflect an essential personal mantra that we must assume in order to maintain balance and wellbeing in our lives. The incubator for such a balance should be a priority in schools and conversations at home.

The science of applied positive psychology is the study of optimal human functioning and can be summarized in three words according to Dr. Christopher Peterson: *Other People Matter* (2006). Research across the world on wellbeing as reported by Aked et al.(2008), based on the famous *Foresight Report* conducted by the *New Economics Foundation*, points to five common threads that lead to enhanced wellbeing whether it be a student or an established adult:

- Being connected to others
- Leading an active life inclusive of physical exercise
- Exercising mindfulness regarding all around you and the environment
- Engaging in continuous learning
- Focusing on the donation of time, talent or personal assets

Furthermore, ground-breaking work by Rath and Harter (2010) identified five essential pillars of wellbeing that encompass the human experience: career, social, financial, physical and community wellbeing. The balance among these five pillars positions a person to flourish and enjoy good health and happiness.



What is surprising is that this same research uncovered that only 7% of the world's population is doing well in all five of the essential pillars above, and 66% are doing well in at least one of them. And, if that were not enough, the authors of the study also noted that only 20% of us around the world like what we do every day. The concern is that if we do not do something now to change how students view their world, this cycle of dissatisfaction will trickle into the current dissatisfied work force. The result would magnify the loss of billions of dollars already being experienced by companies each year due to worker absenteeism, lack of work productivity or inability to work effectively in teams.

Given the research, there is no time like the present to invest in our youth and to get them to see the message behind the sneakers. It is essential to provide a platform from which our youth can navigate the complexities of the world in which they live while assisting them to find meaning in their lives, enjoyment of a true sense of vitality, investment in mental development and last, a daily plan to promote a healthy body. Look at the Columbine, Sandy Hook and the Virginia Tech incidents. If the environment in those schools had promoted student wellbeing, a sound mind and a healthy body, those incidents might not have reached the tragic level that they did.

As it turns out, groundbreaking research by the father of Positive Psychology, Dr. Martin Seligman (2011), provided a map for flourishing and wellbeing, namely, PERMA. The acronym refers to a balance in wellbeing and flourishing that can be achieved by balancing a life filled with Positivity, Enthusiasm, Relationships, Meaning and Achievement. The model has since been expanded by the work of Emiliya Zhiotovskaya, founder of the Flourishing Center in New York City, to include an additional element, Vitality: PERMA-V (2015). Between the two, PERMA-V can no longer be the subject only of graduate schools and post-graduate programs, but needs to be a common understanding in middle, high school and undergraduate programs.



This leads to a challenge to our youth as well as to our dissatisfied population of workers. The next time you put on a pair of ASICS and go to work out as part of the PERMA-V adopted wellbeing model, perhaps behind the sneaker will be the understanding of the importance to seek a life filled with positivity, enthusiasm, relationships where others matter, a sense of meaning to what one does, believes and lives, an appreciation of achievement and goal obtainment, and yes, physical life choices to enhance physical wellbeing and vitality. For school administrators and teachers, perhaps the next step to take is to adopt the PERMA-V model, the five pillars of wellbeing and the five common threads to wellbeing in order to create a tapestry of flourishing for all students.

#### References

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#### *About the Author:*

*Dr. Christopher Nagy is the Superintendent for the Burlington County Special Services and Burlington County Institute of Technology School Districts. He is a college assistant professor, author of a book, blogs and many articles that focus on leadership and Applied Positive Psychology. He recently earned his certification in Applied Positive Psychology from the Flourishing Center in NYC. He may be contacted at [cnagy@bcit.cc](mailto:cnagy@bcit.cc).*