Appreciative Inquiry and Strengths-Based Leadership:

Engaging Stakeholders in Promoting a Positive School Climate

and

Activating a “Dream Team”

For

A Junior High School

A Capstone Action Project

Submitted to Claremont Lincoln University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Ethical Leadership Program

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Abstract

This project focuses on the use of Appreciative Inquiry and strengths-based leadership to design an atmosphere for positive change in an underperforming Junior High School by creating space for dialogue, personal action, and change. The research question is “Can positive social change occur at the junior high school by focusing and building upon current individual and organizational strengths?” The stakeholder group is those who have an interest in the students enrolled in the junior high school and anyone who wants to be a part of positive change.

Appreciative Inquiry was used to ask questions about possibilities and to create innovative approaches to maximize everyone’s potential. This energizing method helped stakeholders identify areas they would like to bring their strengths to the organization. The process resulted in an active group of individuals willing to come together in a new way to create positive change, also known as the Dream Team. This coming together created action and optimism during the first weeks of school which demonstrates that there is a palate for positive change within the school environment. We will continue this constructive movement throughout the school year and beyond.

Keywords: Action Research, Appreciative Inquiry, Positive School Promotion, Strengths-based Leadership, Dream Team.
Acknowledgements

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My family has become accustomed to living with a lifelong learner, and I am forever indebted for their love, patience, and belief in my dream of a higher education. The completion of this program has further fueled my passion to “be the change you wish to see in the world.”
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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction to Project

Purpose and Scope

Observing the school climate at a local junior high school this past year provided me the opportunity to see glaring issues in student engagement and low morale among the staff. I was shocked at the pervasive pessimistic attitude, negative expectations for student success and the lack of hope for change I regularly witnessed. As the year progressed, I saw an opportunity to bring positive social change to my alma mater (my employer) by promoting positive school climate.

The Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process focuses on asking positive questions which enhance a sense of personal power and an opportunity to be heard. The stakeholders have an interest in the performance of the school and those who understand the mission, share a vision and possess some passion for student success can be powerful catalysts for positive change. The research question this Capstone Action Project is asking is “Can positive social change (community pride and parental involvement) occur at the junior high school by focusing and building upon the current individual and organizational strengths?”

The stakeholders for this project are those who have a desire to be a part of positive change. They are members of the traditional two-parent families with siblings and every other combination imaginable: i.e., single parents, grandparents, lesbian, or gay. The leadership involved in the project includes the Superintendent of Schools (former principal of the junior high school), the current principal of the junior high school, and a school board member.
Giving credit where it is due, the Capstone Action Project, thrust me into a high energy, conspicuous position of leadership within the school community. Taking the lead on positive school climate promotion and focusing on the good created space for others to do the same. My personal optimism fueled other’s positive thoughts and encouraged them to step boldly into the realm of action to improve the lives of our children. The observable action showed stakeholders ways to create change through mindfulness, dialogue, and collaboration which allowed them to participate in a positive promotion at levels they felt comfortable and capable of doing so.

The project commenced in the summer and culminated into a successful start of school when optimism and engagement are traditionally high. There are a series of deliverables and benchmarks which are products of this Capstone Action Project. These process steps are like the scaffolding I have experienced at CLU, manageable pieces of information that allow us to see ourselves in a new way and are outlined below in Table 1.

Table 1 - Capstone Action Deliverables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deliverable</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry Brochure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>This introduced all stakeholders to the Capstone Action Project and suggested that there were other valid scientifically researched ways to approach change within the Junior High School environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Invitation to Participate in Dream Team</td>
<td>In addition to the Brochure, all stakeholders were invited to be a part of the Dream Team. This created an atmosphere of inclusivity and opportunity to participate in the dialogue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry Survey</td>
<td>All stakeholders were asked to participate in a survey which was designed to plant seeds of optimism by reflecting on peak educational experiences and thinking about the good qualities of the local school system. The results were used to gauge readiness for change within the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation to the Board of Trustees</td>
<td>The stakeholder’s survey was presented during the Board’s annual retreat and demonstrated how the stakeholders could become a part of the strengths-based change. Stressed the importance of administrative and board buy-in to the process of change and positive school climate promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Activation of the Dream Team</td>
<td>The three meetings followed the Appreciative Inquiry process which helped encourage possibility thinking. The goal was to initiate at least one project to create a positive atmosphere for the beginning of the year, and they chose the Mentoring Buddy Program. The unduplicated count of participants was 41 stakeholders over the three-meeting series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teacher's Meeting (Dream Team Spillover)</td>
<td>An unforeseen project was the result of the first teacher’s meeting of the year when it was suggested that the Dream Team promote a school clean-up campaign. Utilizing the cohesion of an emerging group, the Dream Team, paved the way for organization and promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mentoring Buddy Program</td>
<td>Every 7th Grade student was assigned a mentor to help them transition during the first week of school. This created an atmosphere of kindness, helpfulness, and compassion among the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Put Some Skin in the Game” Clean Up Campaign</td>
<td>Stakeholders were invited to spend one hour cleaning up the school grounds before the first home football game. Nearly 100 people participated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I would be remiss if I failed to mention that the School District had already been the benefactor of two previously drafted Capstone Action Projects that were implemented during the school year stimulated by assignments in CLU classes and research papers. The success of these projects created a reputation for thoroughly researched, well planned and appropriately executed ideas. These endeavors, as shown in Figure 1 “Diary of a Capstone Action Project,” also created
opportunities for relationship building through collaboration, dialogue, change and reflection during the school year among myself and colleagues.

Guiding Values and Project Significance

Appreciative Inquiry involves the “art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential.” 1 The positive framework of AI also produces a different “energy” when it comes to school reform. Facilitating a change that focuses on the positive, wholesome and good things about my community and its members; the school and its students is very appealing to me. Some of the guiding values for this Capstone Action Project are based on the Appreciative Inquiry methodology of Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. I believe this will be the first time this method has been utilized within the school district and community to facilitate conversation and positive change.

My values guiding this project have been detected and strengthened during the 18 months of Claremont Lincoln University studies in the Masters of Ethical Leadership program. One of the first assignments was to develop a list of personal values that have guided my life and are incorporated into this Capstone Action Project. In addition, our study of strengths-based leadership and the completion of the Gallup Clifton Strengths Insight Guide last year narrowed my personal leadership focus. Subsequently, embracing my strongest identified strength of positivity has sharpened my natural instinct to “repeatedly go out of your way to support, inspire, motivate or embolden various individuals.” 2

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2 CliftonStrengths, Strengths Insight Guide for Kathy Trujillo, Survey Completion 10-24-2016, Pg. 3
Wisdom - The guiding value that led me to work in the public-school system within my hometown is the belief that every student is entitled to a free and public education and should be given the ability to live up to their highest potential. Cultivating knowledge and sharing wisdom is essential to the evolution of our society, the future of my community and cultivating peace in this world.

Service – The public-school system has the responsibility of educating our youth. In my professional position within the school, I can guide students in their social/emotional development and remove obstacles in the way of their obtaining an education. A public school provides a valuable service to the youth within the community and has the responsibility of forming the future global citizenry.

Enthusiasm – My extroverted nature and positive disposition help counter the prevailing pessimistic and negative narrative regarding the public school system. My ability to help others focus on the positive will assist in creating new opportunities and potential within the school environment and families. My natural ability to bring out the best in others is seen as genuine and is part of an authentic, strengths-based leadership style.

Excellence – Approaching school life in the spirit of continuous improvement and the desire to offer a quality experience for our students is important to the community and stakeholders. Striving for excellence and setting high goals helps create the Pygmalion Effect, a scientific research phenomena that suggest that high expectations result in high performance.

I began noticing deficiencies in the junior high school environment upon my arrival to the school one year ago. Continuous complaining among the teachers, support staff, students and
others provided clues to what was felt to be “wrong” with the school. However, because of my omnipresent positivity, it was not until a colleague pointed out that underlying negativity was the driving force in the school climate was I able to begin thinking about the problem in a new way. Throughout the year I also noticed that the parents of the students were non-participatory in student activities and avoided parent/teacher communication. The unwelcoming and negative school environment discouraged parental and community participation at the school.

Gap identification regarding school climate promotion began as I became mindful of the pervasive negativity and started to learn about how staff felt about how “malfunctioning” things were at the junior high school. The staff regularly mentioned how unmanageable the students were and how disengaged the parents/guardians/ caregivers had become. As a new employee, I was tempted to believe this narrative, but began asking the question, “Why?” While engaging in conversation, in addition to having the persistent negative attitude being pointed out to me, I noticed a hopelessness in the school climate.

Positive school climate promotion has been a way to improve schools throughout our nation and globally. The Canadian Ministry of Education notes that a positive learning and teaching environment is essential if students are to succeed in school. The working definition they offer is “A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behavior.”3 The purpose of this project is to engage the stakeholders of the junior high school in positive dialogue and to create an environment where

action can support the administration, staff, and students in a successful school year.

Limitations

There are no expectations that a 10-week Capstone Action Project will instantly change a school and community culture that has been decades in the making (although I guess it could). The Capstone Action Project is designed to help explore possibilities and to discuss the good in individual strength development, within the school environment and community. The project is anticipated to plant seeds of positive inquiry that can develop into full conversations, projects, collaborations and change in the future. This project is an initial experiment in the use of Appreciate Inquiry within the school community and with its stakeholders. The scope of changing a negative narrative into a permanent “positive” dialogue is limited due to the nature of habitual thinking patterns and skepticism. However, awareness of how negative conversation impacts our current view of the world could spark a change in myself and stakeholders.

Definition of Terms

*Appreciative Inquiry 5-D Cycle*

*Define* – Clarify the focus by setting an affirmative topic to explore. The process starts by clarifying what people want to inquire into (topic choice). The topic sets the agenda for learning, knowledge sharing, and action. The selection of topic also helps assess the willingness for participants to look at problems from a non-traditional strengths-based approach to generate new conversations.

*Discover* – Appreciate the best by engaging all stakeholders in identifying strengths and best practices. Once the focus is clear, the process of discovery begins,
looking for both past and present examples of desired states. The existing strengths create and help define the positive core.

**Dream** – Imagine the possibilities by creating a vision about discovered potential. Asking the question “what would we be like if we were our very best?” invokes a mental process of improvement and imagination. In this phase, the stakeholders use the discoveries of the last phase to create possibilities that expand beyond perceived limitations.

**Design** – Determine the direction by designing an organization that magnifies the positive core. This phase is the time for the team to brainstorm various proposals and questions and mobilize resources. Imaging and describing shifts in systems, roles, resources and other existing structures is important in the design phase.

**Destiny** – Create the future by building hope and sustaining momentum. Once the team has designed strategies for moving forward, it is time to bring them into being. This part of the AI process is empowering as it encourages individuals to experiment with and reinforce what works.

*The Pygmalion effect*, or Rosenthal effect, is the phenomenon whereby higher expectations lead to an increase in performance. The effect is named after the Greek myth of Pygmalion, a sculptor who fell in love with a statue he had carved, or alternately, after the Rosenthal-Jacobson study.

**School Climate** – According to the National School Climate Center. School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students’, parents’ and school personnel’s experience of school life and reflects, norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationship, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures.
Stakeholders - person with an interest or concern in something. *

*Stakeholders for the purpose of this Capstone Action Project do not include minor students at the school. Only adult stakeholders participated in the research conducted for this paper.
CHAPTER 2 - Literature Review and Initial Stakeholder Dialogue

Introduction to Literature Review

As noted earlier in this research paper, I had asked the question “why” the school climate at the Junior High School had deteriorated. As soon as I felt I understood the “whys,” I began looking for “how” that could be remedied. I was introduced to Appreciative Inquiry through my studies at Claremont Lincoln University and began to narrow my research into this strengths-based approach of positive school climate promotion. I discovered some projects that highlighted the use of Appreciative Inquiry in improving the educational system. The literature review took place during the Spring semester and consisted of journal articles, dissertations, and findings of the use of Appreciative Inquiry in educational settings.

An Overview of Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Research in school improvement indicates that reform efforts are often dictated by people outside of education who try to create a “one size fits all” approach. School reform frequently feels discouraging as it focuses on the failures of students, teachers, and administrators. According to Buchanan such efforts, “Rarely result in new vision and are notorious for generating defensiveness.” 4 The traditional approach to problem-solving is to look at what is going wrong and attempt to improve it. It is suggested that AI is a change process that “has a

positive focus, is essentially self-organizing, encourages deep reflection and avoids the pitfalls of manipulation of school administrators.”  

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The review of the literature available has created the framework for the Capstone Action Project and incorporation of the AI process to include utilization of a 5-D Cycle (Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny). In addition, the literature and research offered examples of best practices to initiate a project, suggestions on how to focus on important questions and the role of leadership. The use of Appreciative Inquiry creates an environment of shared leadership and collaboration. This environment frees the stakeholders to create new and innovative solutions that capitalize on systems that are already working. As noted in Markova, “How can parents and guardians lead a movement where each child in the world will be recognized as a valued resource to be developed instead of a problem to be solved?”

Appreciative Inquiry also involves the “art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential.” 7 The energy created by the asking of positive questions and the telling of “peak experience” stories can free the stakeholder’s current view of public school systems to a collaborative space that offers creative options to capitalize on opportunities. Cooperrider’s research regarding Appreciative Inquiry noted that the language we use (positive or negative) frames thinking and perspective. 8 When prompted to share positive experiences and to participate in inspiring conversation everything tilts in a more productive position.

6 D. Markova and Bea Mah Holland, “Appreciative Inquiry: a strategy for change in systemic leadership that builds on organization strengths, not deficits,” School Administrator (February 2005).
7 T. Orr and M. Cleveland-Innes, “Appreciative Leadership: Supporting Education Innovation,” International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, Volume 16, Number 4, Pg. 236.
8 Pamela Buchanan, “Appreciative Inquiry: A Path to Change in Education,” Pg. 31
The positive framework of AI also produces a different “energy” when it comes to school reform. According to Elliot, “Feeling is as important and understanding because the methodology teaches us that the energy for change comes both from the heart and the head.” When considering the practicalities of expending my energy to facilitate a Capstone Action Project that focuses on positive change, I can feel my anticipation and optimism surge. Collaborating with others in this way is my definition of a win/win.

The literature review consistently outlined a well-documented process for conducting Capstone Action Projects with Appreciative Inquiry. This process requires me to bring my best talents to the organization, focus on my leadership strengths and to develop a new skill set and learn right along with the participants. As noted in Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry Handbook the process is best used for a “type of search and exploration for shared meaning that can lead to powerful images of the future that then calls for action to realize that preferred future.” Calabrese writes extensively about his research team’s methodologies, data collection processes and outcomes in a very similar rural, struggling school system. The researcher’s questions, facilitation strategies, and follow-up are helpful in anticipating what could occur during the process of the AI Change project.

Although the collective effort of AI is where the transformational magic occurs, leadership must be present throughout the process. According to Orr, “An Appreciative Leader can be the catalyst for change and look for the best in others.” Utilizing a strength-based

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leadership approach in addition to Appreciative Inquiry is a way to “double down” on positive ways to facilitate a productive research process. Employing this method helps flatten the hierarchical structure as all stakeholders who participate in the project are empowered to create what is necessary to move their families and the school forward. Engaged leadership will be required to create an environment primed for transformation.

The Literature Review also revealed that when a leader asks powerful, positive, value-based questions, they send a clear message that they expect the answers to provide the pathway to success. The win/win of this Capstone Action Project is that through skill development in the AI process myself and others will strengthen their natural skill sets. As the leader, I will be asked to develop new habits, frames of references, opinions, and ways of communicating. This project will require me to consistently work from my own “positive core,” to mentor and constructively lead others. Cooperrider’s handbook also reminds us that “When you are prepared to believe in people, trust them, and acknowledge that they know best about what needs to be done – at work and in their lives – Appreciative Inquiry is for you.”

G. R. Bush writes that the leader’s role in an effective change process becomes a “tracking and fanning” as they work to amplify the innovations that individuals want to nurture and generating the enthusiasm for individuals to self-organize and take action. The role of the leader in initiating an AI project is critical to the overall success as role modeling and redirecting becomes part of the inquiry process that helps combat a historically negative dialogue. The AI process was also lauded for encouraging deep reflection and avoiding the pitfalls that traditional change projects often encounter when dealing with school administrators. The process of AI

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helps assure that many voices and perspectives are considered when looking for avenues for positive change.

AI can also be used to create sustainable change projects in communities. Looking beyond the school environment and seeking ways to inspire change in the town can help support the learning community in many respects. The energy created focusing on strengths can start projects that have meaning, foster a passion for innovation and change and generate some sustainability. In his writing, “Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry,” Charles Elliot suggests framing questions that help stakeholders think about a time in their lives when “someone really believed in you and saw your strengths.” These responses can be a catalyst for positive change both individually, within family units, and institutionally. As each stakeholder begins to explore and appreciate the positive aspects of their roles in supporting their families, the school environment, and the community, action steps for the future will be to focus and accentuate the good that already exists in other aspects of their lives.

The “Positive Principle” as outlined by Cooperrider suggests that momentum for change “requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding, attitudes such as hope, inspiration, and the sheer joy of creating with one another.” The power of positive imagery and positive language will be the framework for this project which also includes applications of positive psychology.

As the Capstone Action Project calls me into the change agent role, it will be necessary for me to help others to see themselves as change agents as well. According to F. C. Lunenburg,

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the change agent is “anyone who has the skill and power to stimulate, facilitate and coordinate the change effort.” Creating a large team of change agents, the Junior High School Dream Team will generate the synergy necessary for this project to gain footing and sustainability beyond the 10-week Capstone timeframe. Multiple change agents can form a trusting environment where dreams can become a reality.

**School Environment Research**

Current perspectives regarding school climate suggest that the educational environment can help support a “productive, contributive and satisfying life in a democratic society.” The Capstone Action Project is designed to help create opportunities for stakeholders to work together to create such a supportive environment. Many aspects of the school environment can be impacted by positive promotions to include operations and the physical environment provided for the students. Engaged stakeholders can also provide additional resources and energy for projects that are deemed overwhelming or too demanding for a small staff to carry out.

Components of school climate are overlapping and interconnected and relate directly to how safe the students feel in the school environment and the caliber of relationships that are developed. The stability and strength of these two components are directly correlated to student academic success. Feeling safe is a fundamental human need that must be secured before additional growth and learning can take place. This philosophy of “each level is prepotent to the

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next level”\textsuperscript{19} is outlined in the \textit{Journal of Humanistic Psychology} in discussing of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. (See Figure 2).

Building a safe school environment where students are not exposed to violence, peer-victimization, harassment, bullying or subjected to disciplinary actions that are viewed as unfair or punitive is an important part of creating a positive school climate. The current threat of online cyber bullying and other silent electronic forms of harassment results in lower student engagement, increases absenteeism and greater potential for aggression and victimization. The consistent enforcement of school rules and the thorough investigation of reports of bullying or violence supports a positive school environment where students feel safe and supported.

The caliber and quality of staff-student relationships help create a trusting school environment. Positive adult relationships foster greater student engagement and provide the foundation for social/emotional learning in an academic environment. This relationship is reflux as noted by Eric Schaps, Ph.D., “As students become more capable and included to contribute to the supportive school context, they in effect promote, along with the school’s faculty, an ‘upward spiral’ by which community is strengthened and those in it are further benefited.”\textsuperscript{20} Allowing the present antagonistic relationship between parents, students, and teachers to continue without intervention invites continued negative discourse and poor academic performance.

Current research conducted by Heather Forbes, LSCW which couples with Maslow’s Hierarchy suggest that social and emotional supports are required to be in place before a student can become primed for academic learning. Forbes’ notes, “Every interaction you have with a


child is an opportunity to help the child regulate, make a positive emotional connection.” She also writes in Chapter 9 about the importance of creating an “entire school atmosphere of addressing the emotional and relationship needs of all your students.”21 The Hierarchy of Learning is shown in Figure 3 and highlights how important a supportive and safe school environment and external factors are to a student’s overall academic success.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) defines school connectedness as “the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals.”22 A positive environment is built upon how connected everyone feels within the school. The Dream Team will ultimately offer a safe space for perspective building and collaboration among all stakeholders. In this environment, the ability for others to show care and concern will be nurtured, as will the development of relationships that can foster a positive school climate.

Past Perspectives Regarding School Environment

In a current research paper School Climate: Researching Policy, Practice, and Teacher Education it is indicated that “Educators have written about and studied school climate for 100 years.” 23 This paper reports that how school climate affects the process of learning was first written about in 1908. Another researcher in 1927 focused on the social dimensions of school life and how the school should concentrate on supporting “engaged democratic citizens.” These

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case studies helped elevate the conversation about the added responsibilities of education over just teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Over the past decade, the School District has suffered from significant decline. A considerable decrease in student enrollment leads to diminished funding and leaves a district scrambling to provide basic services. Standardized test scores and other evaluation metrics consistently place the schools in the lower quadrant of state results in a state that rests at the bottom of national rankings. The feelings of hopelessness and consequences of failure are hard to avoid.

During the 1990’s a robust Parent-Teacher Association created opportunities to support the teaching community. Parent-leaders met regularly, raised funds and assisted with school events. A disastrous change in leadership led to the permanent disbanding of the organization. Four years ago, an attempt at a Parent-Teacher’s Organization lasted only a few months when members of the community became entrenched in the superintendent’s political agenda and failed to find common ground and projects to work on.
Present Perspectives Regarding Positive School Environment

Present best practices and perspectives regarding school climate are found in School Climate: Researching Policy, Practice and Teacher Education which suggests that “School climate is based on patterns of people’s experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. However, school climate is more than individual experience: It is a group phenomenon that is larger than any one person’s experience.”24 Another current perspective offered regarding school climate portrays a shared vision developed through the collaboration of students, families, and educators. “School climate refers to spheres of school life (e.g., safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment) as well as to larger organizational patterns (e.g., from fragmented to cohesive or ‘shared’ vision, healthy or unhealthy, conscious or unrecognized).”25

Two current narratives expressed at the junior high school are: that our school will be “taken over by the state” if we cannot improve our one-star rating and that “this junior high class is the ‘worst’ class ever.” These negative beliefs are in addition to the recent high-profile arrest of a special education teacher that cast a negative pallor on school staff members. I have noticed that when we refer to the junior high students, particularly in a negative way, we address them as a unit and not as individual students. Thus, the language we have developed in addressing the student body has created a negative experience for every student even those who might be excelling in the classroom or fully engaged in student activities.

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25 Ibid, Pg. 181.
A new component regarding modern day school climate issues is the emergence of technology and social media. Electronic platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Snap Chat are viewed daily by students at our schools which allows students to perpetuate reports of negative activities within the school unchecked. As noted in Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics, “Today’s college students have grown up with the Internet, and it is difficult for many of them to imagine life without it.”26 The continued growth of digital media requires that the view of the potential audience expands to include non-stakeholders who are accessing blogs, vlogs, podcasts, webcasts, and video. Failing to communicate with stakeholders through social media fosters disengagement and creates barriers to creating a shared vision.

A school board’s habitual focus on the negative can be reflective of a community’s current mood and perception of the public-school system. As educational leaders, board members can be unaware of how their language and actions are setting the tone for school climate in the entire district. The Center for Emotional and Social Education suggests that “District policymakers and educational leaders have a responsibility to assist their schools in creating and sustaining quality school climate and model these characteristics in their organization and actions.” 27 Thus, the reach of the Capstone Action Project with the junior high school is hoped to extend to the school board and adjacent schools.

Future Possibilities Regarding Positive School Environment

The June Board of School Trustees meeting offered a glimpse of an organization that is preparing to face change in a positive way as every principal was asked to report on “something good going on in their schools.” Wallowing in negativity requires a significant amount of energy and can dissipate any hope or optimism that the board might encounter. Creating a school atmosphere that is primed for change means that buy-in and support will need to be garnered every step of the way and will require input and support from the stakeholders.

The trailblazing position that I currently hold which is funded by the Nevada Department of Education is an indicator of future perspectives of positive school climate promotion. The Nevada Legislature has provided money for more than 200 individuals to address school climate conditions in schools throughout Nevada. The data collected throughout the school year resulted in additional funding for the next biennium. Interestingly, we are not educators, but primarily social workers striving to understand the dynamics of a complicated school system to focus on the social and emotional aspects of a quality education.

As the future of school climate and positive promotion relates to change at the School District, there was not a formal group of proactive individuals prior to the formation of the Junior High Dream Team. Many people and leaders within the school district have failed to recognize the downturn in stakeholder engagement which has caused part of the resultant negative perception of our schools, teachers, and administration. The activation of the Dream Team and focusing on individual and organizational strengths is a way to create a group of stakeholders interested in creating a more positive school environment.
Stakeholders Perspectives Regarding Positive School Environment

Stakeholders within the structure of the school system are teachers, support staff, and administrators. The principal, school superintendent and school board face public scrutiny and potential loss of employment or voter confidence if improvements in our schools cannot be made. There are also groups of people who represent stakeholder organizations: the certified and classified unions, alumni organizations, and student councils. The issue of academic achievement is important to most community members, and I consider them stakeholders. They are also shareholders as our schools are publicly funded through local, state and federal dollars. Local businesses and organizations have difficulty in recruiting top professionals with families as new hires want their children to go to a successful public school.

The stakeholders I will be working with, parents/guardians/caregivers of students who attend the junior high school are in a precarious position as there has been an adversarial and tension-filled relationship developed with the school district. As their students transition into the high school environment, these stakeholders are unsure and tentative regarding how to become best involved in their students’ education. Dickerson suggests that the success of schools is “heavily influenced by connections between school, family, and community.” 28 The Capstone Action Project is designed to strengthen these connections to invite stakeholders into the schools and to fashion a future that meets their goals and expectations.

During the school year and while preparing for the Capstone Action Project, I have spoken to hundreds of students, every teacher and administrator, support staff and many parents. The purpose of these conversations was varied but often turned to the problem we were trying to

address. In addition, some of these interactions were not designed to problem solve, but more to vent. Figure 4 outlines the Capstone Action Project Communication Methods Flowchart, which helps synthesize the flow of stakeholder input. Providing an outlet for problem-solving and action via the Dream Team will be a welcomed gesture as the school year progresses as it has a constructive purpose.

From the student perspective, the Junior High schoolers complain about the lack of classroom management, question the fairness of having their nutrition break discontinued and express feelings of exclusion from school activities. Staff and high school students complain about the junior high students, calling them the “worst class ever,” and outwardly wish that corporal punishment could somehow be reinstated. The janitors feel disrespected on a regular basis, while maintenance and school secretaries expressed overwhelm with the workload. Parents frequently posted on Facebook regarding their dissatisfaction with communication with the school, with arbitrary rules be enforced or ignored or with unpopular decisions making headlines and inciting negative discourse. I noticed an overall dissatisfaction with the school climate, educational environment, and lack of community support.

Developing viable solutions for positive school climate promotion has been difficult, and is due in part to the absence of collaborative community efforts over the past decade. Mattessich’s optimism regarding collaboration indicates, “Many organizations, in fact, now believe the ability to get certain results can happen only through joint service efforts.”29 As the dwindling student population has led to fewer resources, collaboration can reduce personal expenses and help everyone reach shared goals.

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Conclusion

David Cooperrider said it best, “Appreciative Inquiry begins an adventure...an invitation, as some have declared, to a ‘positive revolution.’” 30 Articles referring to the utilization of Appreciative Inquiry consistently mentioned his research which prompted me to purchase and read the Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change, Second Edition. I have listened to several interviews that Cooperrider participated in so I could hear “in his own words,” the essence of AI. I began to actively explore AI concepts utilized in dynamic settings, to develop knowledge of the framework, become familiar with the AI language all in order to initiate the process of changing my own established and automatic problem-solving mental processes.

David Cooperrider’s Appreciative Inquiry Handbook has provided meaningful guidance to many change agents since he developed and wrote this foundational handbook outlining the process. The AI Handbook has provided underlying principles, presentation outlines, and example narratives. This author was the common denominator in much of the literature review as he has long-standing experience with the process. Cooperrider notes, “AI can’t be ‘sold’ without giving people an experience.” 31 As this will be my first experience as well, I am looking forward to the AI journey in creating positive change within myself, positive dialogue with the stakeholders and a hopeful future for the school district and my community.

Reviewing Cooperrider’s work has helped me look at personal and professional problems from a positive strengths-based lens. This is a testimony to the premise that Cooperrider notes that we, “move toward what we study.” 32 Immersing myself in the world of Appreciative

32 Ibid, Pg. 33.
Inquiry has been a positive experience and has helped balance much of exposure to the negativity that I have within my life, work, and community. Additionally, the unlimited potential that I envision for Appreciative Inquiry in the world is inspiring.
CHAPTER 3 - Methods Determined with Stakeholders

Project Goal Determined by Researcher and Stakeholders

My interviews started with talking to the Superintendent of Schools during the hiring process and throughout the school year. We worked with each other daily, and I could see his philosophy in action as he dealt with students and other issues. A few months later, the Superintendent approached me about pessimistic attitudes, and I talked to him about my research and the ways Appreciative Inquiry could help lead the board in the direction of strengths-based change and would assist in creating positive dialogue.

I then discussed school climate promotion ideas with the Junior High Principal. He guides and directs the school on a day-to-day basis. Our management styles and philosophies are complementary, and he is key to affecting change within the school. Our conversations have helped guide and direct positive change within the school as we work collaboratively to reach academic benchmarks and remove social, emotional and economic roadblocks in our students’ way.

My colleague, the guidance counselor, is a stakeholder who I interact with daily. He has been instrumental in helping me manage the students, a source of peer-to-peer support and comic relief. He is key to influencing change within the organization and is a strong advocate for the students. He is also unafraid to take on difficult conversations and offer different perspectives to avoid group think or hasty decision making.

Two other support staff members are extremely valuable to the school climate and we have long-standing friendships and strong community ties. Both staff members have offered
daily guidance and constant support in creating a positive atmosphere, communication, and support.

Participating in teacher’s meetings has been a primary source of stakeholder information. Through the discussions initiated at the teacher’s meetings, several teachers seek me out regularly for dialogue and advice. This proactive group of stakeholders has various opinions, ideas, and suggestions on how to solve problems within the student body and were the first to volunteer to be part of this project. The teachers have a vested interest in positive school climate promotion but also had the capacity to influence the students in the most profound and immediate way in the classroom.

The student body has communicated the most interesting perspective. I have read letters from 8th graders who suggested recommended changes to the principal and spoken to hundreds of students formally and informally. Students can articulate problems they experience and talk about their fears and concerns in a forthright manner. These discussions have created many problem-solving opportunities, and many of the concerns raised were included in the final summer school proposal and Capstone Action Plan. Conversations with students have resulted in help with transitioning to the grade levels, peer-to-peer mentoring and role modeling, student forums and favorable circumstances for open dialogue.

The final group of stakeholders to be engaged is the parents. I speak to parents individually and face-to-face primarily related to problems their students are having. The global stakeholder discussion with parents has not taken place in this community for more than six years. Additionally, a stakeholder interview with the community as a whole (employers, citizens, etc.) has not been initiated for an even longer time. Parent’s and guardian’s voices are an important piece of school improvement and are certainly part of the overall goal.
Appendix B, the Stakeholder Collaboration Log, outlines the collaborative process and efforts utilized to engage stakeholders. This outline also demonstrates the need for cohesiveness within the school community, a place where all stakeholders can gather and build perspectives. In communicating with a graduating Senior (who later presented her story to the teachers), I was saddened to learn that her experience as a Junior High School student had been extremely disruptive to her overall educational progress. The morning she explained this to her former teachers and the current principal I could literally see a “spark” of understanding and compassion.

Project Methods Determined by Researcher and Stakeholders

The Capstone Action Project is designed to provide the framework and structure to engage stakeholders in conversation and collaboration with the hopes of having one or more viable projects to present to the Principal of the Junior High School. The project parameters also include that we have the financial means, energy, and leadership necessary to execute during the first month of the school year. The communication needed and the process used to decide upon the project and measure the effectiveness required a month of preparatory work to activate the Junior High Dream Team. This methodology is highlighted in Figure 4 – Capstone Communication Methods Flowchart.

The first Dream Team meeting was held. There were 12 participants; I had set a goal of 10% or 7. The representation consisted of three Junior High Teachers, one High School Counselor, one attendance secretary, two janitors, one parent, two grandparents, one 6th grade student and one high school student and myself. I observed that the configuration of the group made some individuals uncomfortable. Teachers were accustomed to meeting among themselves...
without a parent or student participation. The janitors asked if it was “okay” if they stayed because they were typically excluded from meetings as classified staff members. The 6th-grade student was extremely uncomfortable and later sparked the idea for the action project.

We started the meeting with setting an affirmative topic to discuss. This is step one in the Appreciative Inquiry 5-D Cycle. This step initiated some lively conversation, and I was required to gently redirect participants on four occasions to remain focused on our positive topic. The 6th grader spoke up and indicated how petrified she was to come to school on the first day. The participants began forming ideas about ways we could make their first day more comfortable and a “buddy” idea was presented by the attendance secretary. She told a compelling story of her son being paired with a Junior on his first day of school and how that helped him pass his math class because the mentor stayed involved in his progress all year. The possibility of pairing students up in a way that created opportunities for educational and emotional support all year was compelling. The idea was taken to the Principal who endorsed the concept and added a few of his ideas in that process.

Two days later an abbreviated report regarding the survey data and the activation of the Junior High Dream Team was presented to the Board of School Trustees. As the opening presentation for the Board’s annual “retreat,” I gave the information in a positive and optimistic manner. The board’s response was lively and hopeful as we discussed peak experiences, positive developments that took place over the summer and plans for the beginning of the school year. I suggested that the Dream Team would likely expand and evolve throughout the year. We discussed the positive prospects of having a stakeholder group could be counted on as a resource for future project development for the remainder of the school year.
The mentoring/mentee or Mentoring Buddy Program as agreed upon by the Dream Team was further developed and discussed at the second stakeholder meeting. The membership more than doubled at this meeting, so there were many new participants, including several students. The desired outcome of the Mentoring Buddy Program was to pair up every 7th Grade student with an older mentor student to make them feel more welcome to the school. The mentors were to be empowered to help the younger students transition and to provide information, advice, and comfort.

Project Measurements Determined by Researcher and Stakeholders

The effectiveness of the program was determined through feedback from the staff, students, and principal. The 7th graders were asked by the English teacher if they felt their assigned mentor helped them during the first week of school and if they felt more comfortable during the first week of school. She reported that a majority of the 7th Grade students said that “yes” the mentor had helped them out. Staff reported that the first day of Junior High was much improved over last year and that there were less confusion and disruption in the hallways. It was reported that the students were helpful and friendlier toward each other during the first two days of school over last year.

One piece of negative feedback I received was from an 8th Grade mentor, who mentioned that she really did not know “what to do,” when it came to her role as a buddy. The complexity of being a mentor was not something that the students intrinsically understood. In addition, since they had not had the benefit of being mentees last year when they were in 7th Grade, they did not have past practices or experiences to rely upon. This feedback indicates that leadership training will benefit these students in the future; something I look forward to facilitating.
We reviewed the results of the project at the third stakeholder meeting. This was also the meeting when the mentors were recognized and received their participation rewards. The Mentoring Buddy Program results and the feedback from the students helped single out a theme for our work going forward in helping students transition through their middle school years. The acknowledgment that adolescent years are marked by rapid individual change, and new school settings opened a dialogue of how the Dream Team could assist our students to avoid being part of a downward spiral that is sometimes experienced by our youth.
CHAPTER 4 – Results: Evidence of Change through Project Implementation

The results of the Capstone Action Project have been encouraging. I enjoy watching enthusiasm build for positive change in our schools. Interestingly because I have been working in the schools, thinking about this topic and studying best practices for the past year, I have a personal vision for positive school climate promotion. It is delightful watching others “catch” a vision, interpret it from their own perspective and literally “build,” personal action. I have come to believe that with enough positive energy and strength-based leadership we can tip the scales toward a brighter future for our students.

The positive publicity received from students, parents and our local newspaper is also beginning to tilt a more favorable impression toward the Junior High School and High School. For the past several weeks the Junior High School, the Dream Team and my own Capstone Action Project has been highlighted in the local newspaper. Stakeholders and shareholders who are not currently participating in the research project are, at a minimum, aware of our efforts within the school setting. More consistent communication, in a format that is preferred (Facebook), is now available to stakeholders who wish to stay connected with the school with the creation of the Junior High Dream Team Facebook page. We can announce meetings, highlight students and promote activities in a real time social media platform for the first time.

Every action, no matter how small or large, created a synergy among the stakeholders who suggest that they feel encouraged that there are new and different ways to become involved with the school and other parents. These actions signal to the stakeholders that we collectively recognize areas in need of improvement and are striving to remedy those shortcomings. Feelings of frustration and disappointment are used as fuel to move toward positive school climate promotion and change.
Actions Taken by Researcher and Stakeholders

The initial deliverable, the introduction to Appreciative Inquiry Brochure was received with receptivity. Stakeholders have been provided with a different way of interacting with each other and the school system. Mailing this information to every stakeholder was intended to trigger feelings of inclusiveness and encourage participation. The mailing was also expected to inform the stakeholders of the value that was placed on the success of their students, the objective to engage in positive dialogue and the desire to create a more positive school climate.

Reaching out personally to stakeholders and discussing the project with administrators created positive energy that resulted in three very productive Dream Team meetings. The activation of the Junior High Dream Team has met and exceeded personal and project expectations. As I reviewed the mixed stakeholder representation, it honestly felt like a “handpicked” super committee had been designed. Already the board, administrators, and others are asking if we will continue beyond this initial project as they can “see” the potential that a stakeholder group can bring to the school system.

Student participation in the “Dream Team” meetings was not expected nor anticipated as the constraints of the research project excluded them. The incoming 7th Grader who expressed her feelings of fear sparked the mentor/mentee “buddy” project. Another student expressed a desire to mentor others and although previously rejected by the Principal, received approval because of his participation in the meeting. The future of the Dream Team activities that includes the collective and individual student voices is compelling and exciting. Other actions sparked as a direct result of the stakeholder engagement process and creating the desire to create a positive school environment are included in Table 2 below titled, Bandwagon.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Board Member/Journalist</td>
<td>Welcome Back to Staff</td>
<td>Offered handmade inspirational “puzzle pieces” as part of a positive team building back-to-school activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Teaching Staff, Myself</td>
<td>Back-to-School Night</td>
<td>Information regarding the first day of the school presented, Mentoring Buddy Program introduced, communication survey initiated, school tours conducted, first-day “jitters” discussed and intervened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Secretary, Myself</td>
<td>Organizational Planners/School Supplies</td>
<td>Every Junior High student was presented with new planners, composition notebooks, pens and pencils on the first day to alleviate stress in case they had come unprepared. The planners are designed to facilitate organizational skills and are being used by me as “Gratitude Journals” with students writing down three things they are grateful for every day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, School Board Member/Journalist, Myself</td>
<td>Junior High Hall Ribbon Cutting</td>
<td>Christening of the new Junior High Hall and recognition of the staff members who painted over the summer. Instilled pride in facility and gratefulness toward the custodial staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Teachers, Students, Stakeholders, Myself</td>
<td>School Pride Clean Up</td>
<td>More than 100 stakeholders attended a clean-up event to help pull weeds, rake and pick up garbage. Comments included that the “grounds had never looked so good.” Demonstrated “many hands make light work,” and instilled pride.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Myself</td>
<td>Junior High Students Dream Team Meeting</td>
<td>The principal is planning a lunch meeting specifically to initiate Appreciative Inquiry-type conversations with the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal, Teachers, Myself</td>
<td>Semester-long Book Study with Staff</td>
<td>“Building a Culture of Hope: Enriching Schools with Optimism and Opportunity” will be the focal point.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third and final Dream Team meeting for this research project was held in the evening to accommodate parents who work. Students who participated in the Mentoring Buddy Program were also invited to receive recognition and gift cards for their participation. There were nine
new parent participants, ten students, two teachers, classified staff and myself. The Mentoring Buddy Program highlighted the many ways in which Junior High students were in a transitional phase of their lives and how much easier it would be if they were supported in those times of significant change.

The Dream Team’s closing commentary included discussion of Capstone trips to San Francisco, Washington D.C., and even Germany. Discussion of fundraising started with car washes and ended with writing grants and looking for substantial contributions from foundations. Thus, the team has been formed and dreams sparked during this process. The Junior High Dream Team is alive, and the group will be pursuing formal non-profit status in Nevada and will pair up with another local organization to become eligible for federal nonprofit status. Amazingly the Dream Team’s mission of helping our Junior High students through change, all started with a Capstone Action Project designed to create change.

Measurement of Results

One measure of results of the Capstone Action Program can be based upon participation. The baseline population for the community is 3500, and the Junior High school’s student population is 70. Regarding the electronic survey, there were 15 responses or 23% of the total. The unduplicated count of participation in the Dream Team meetings was 40. The Mentoring Buddy Project resulted in 100% participation with the 7th Grade students, and more than 100 individuals participated in the school wide clean-up campaign.

The Capstone Action Project resulted in more than a dozen news articles in the local paper, with a circulation of 2000, and positive publicity throughout the community. And the new Junior High Dream Team Facebook page reached 850 individuals in the area.
Communication of Results to Stakeholders

In the Dream Team milieu, I observed that a critical component of organizational change is to be able to express opinions and share ideas. I also noticed that having time and space for conversation and the exploration of the positive things in our schools, our families, and students, produces a nice energy where spirits are lifted, and optimism is inspired. Developing more collegial relationships is an unintended consequence of the Dream Team activation.

Evaluating the various methods of communicating with stakeholders has been a productive activity that will come in handy for the rest of the school year. Having a clear understanding of the best method to connect with stakeholders is important. The development of the Junior High Dream Team Facebook page is a step in creating a way to highlight positive activities at the school and keep stakeholders informed. The electronic presence has been a productive way to highlight positive school activities, remind parents of meetings and encourage stakeholders to be involved in the schools.

The Junior High Dream Team meetings demonstrated how a “positive revolution” could be initiated through the use of strengths-based leadership, Appreciative Inquiry, stakeholder participation with a little dose of the magic of timing. When many voices are heard, perspectives represented, and dreams of the future respected, the energy for action is activated. When everyone shares in the reward of a job well done and participates in reflective learning, we create an “upward spiral” of action and positive change.

The results of this project have been communicated directly to the stakeholders in Dream Team meetings, staff, student mentors, and mentees, to the local newspaper and will be discussed with the Board of School Trustees at a future meeting. In discussing results of our projects, meetings, and conversations, we have opened pathways for students to articulate their hopes,
dreams, desires, and fears as meetings with Junior High School students continues to spark ideas for future programming. The cycle of taking action, observation, reflection and building upon organizational and individual strengths is a valid model for continuing positive school climate promotion. I look forward to the day when the scales tip from the pervasive negativity I witnessed to a more hopeful and optimistic outlook for the future.

Assessment of Goal Achievement

Initial feedback from stakeholders and students is that the Mentoring Buddy Program met the goal of helping the 7th Grade students feel welcome in their new environment. Because of the lack of male mentors in the 8th Grade, the utilization of several Sophomores created an opportunity for discussing how to utilize student strengths in positive school climate promotion. Generalized prohibitions and rules that were silently upheld (no mixing of Junior High and High School students) now seem archaic and old fashioned. These types of organizational breakthroughs will help create new conversations regarding multi-generational student interactions and how we can develop appropriate space for student engagement.

This was my baseline back-to-school experience, so I had to rely on the insights of others to compare it to last year. According to the school secretary, who played a large role in additional organization this year, the transition of the 7th graders was markedly better this year. The improvements she noted were: less confusion on the part of the 7th-grade students, more ease in accessing their student lockers and comfortability in getting to each class during the day. It is obvious that having extra hands to help answer questions was valuable on the first day. It also appeared that stakeholders were relieved that the school was doing “something” regarding the difficult transition into the Junior High School, the school environment, academic offerings
and parent engagement. My impression is that the complete package of concerted efforts made a huge difference in the start of the school year.

When the student mentors received recognition and rewards at the Dream Team meeting, it was observable that they were proud to be a part of a successful, innovative project. I also noticed that the student involvement in the Mentoring Buddy Program invited parental involvement into the Dream Team. The team’s conversation naturally gravitated to how we could improve the project for next year and expand it to the 8th graders as they transition into the high school. On a larger scale, the team talked about leadership development, student government and elections, civic engagement and our responsibilities to expanding a world view.

The decision to continue meeting and expanding the Junior High Dream Team was not totally unexpected as the attendance at the meetings had been good and the idea well received and supported by a representative group of stakeholders. The level to which the stakeholders would like to grow was surprising. I found myself trying to “catch up” to the group’s vision as it continued to expand and grow right before my eyes. Taking Junior High students on trips to Washington D.C. or Germany was beyond the capacity of my imagination. As the facilitator, I was forced to continue to expand my view of the team, its vision and prospects for the future. To be a part of something bigger than I even imagined was exciting.

The next day, in a totally unsolicited conversation, the Principal of the Junior High School noted how “perfect” I was for the role I was taking in the school. He offered his appreciation for my healthy respect for authority, the ability to bridge the gap between the parents, the community and the faculty, my communication skills and the regard that I had garnered from the staff and students. I noted how far from “perfect” I was, but how building on individual and organizational strengths brought out the best in us all and how much his support
as the educational leader and willingness to trust in a previously untested engagement process had meant to the overall success of the Capstone Action Project.
CHAPTER 5 - Final Reflections and Recommendations

Overall Project Summary – Mentoring Buddy Program

Positive engagement has been an observable outcome from the Capstone Action Project. The stakeholder’s project, the Mentoring Buddy Program was designed to help alleviate fear and anxiety expressed by emerging 7th Grade students and has created an atmosphere of compassion and caring. Many stakeholders can recall how they felt when entering some events when they felt out of place or unwelcome. Encouraging teamwork and kindness among the students toward each other appears to be contagious.

The first stakeholder meeting consisted of 12 participants. Everyone was asked to “bring a friend,” to the next session and we more than doubled our participation. The third in a series of meetings engaged new stakeholders and resulted in the creation of a new non-profit organization. Overall the trio of meetings encouraged more than 40 stakeholders to join in the Capstone Action Project’s research process and invited exposure to Appreciative Inquiry, dialogue, and collaboration.

The first day of school we launched the Dream Team’s Project, the Mentoring Buddy Program and it was a hit. The more mature students were honored to be a part of the program, and the 7th Graders felt protected and cared for. Teachers helped during the first-day transition as did other older students and the program and preparation brought some calm to an otherwise chaotic day. The interaction among the mentors/mentees accomplished something that adult participation could not, welcoming and acceptance into the student environment. As much as the stakeholders wished to alleviate the stress the 7th Grade students were experiencing, only their peers could accomplish this quickly and effectively.
Consistency of Guiding Values

The guiding values identified in Chapter One were wisdom, service, enthusiasm, excellence. The activation of the Dream Team resulted in the Junior High Mentoring Buddy program which utilized the guiding values in the selected student mentors. Operationalizing the Golden Rule helped guide the project as it was an easy conversation for people to remember a time when they were in a new environment and how “treating others as you like to be treated” is something that resonates in the school environment. I personally observed kindness, compassion, and leadership throughout the day.

Activating my personal strength of positivity and guiding from my positive core led to a series of events that created an atmosphere of optimism and hope during the launch of the school year. The activities also further established my role as a leader within the community and school environment as I helped coordinate action, direct communication and fan somewhat dormant positivity in our stakeholders and students. Shaking the obstacles that I encountered along the way and persevering despite them strengthened my inner fortitude and confidence.

Project Impact on the Researcher

My work in the school district began a year ago, and I am so thankful that I have been able to bring the benefit of my CLU curriculum and the Capstone Action Project process to the public-school system. Immersing myself in the disciplines of mindfulness, dialogue, collaboration and change and being able to experiment with my new-found insights within the school has been energizing. Every positive interaction, successful result and collaborative project fuels me with certitude to continue along the path.
This work has also confirmed the hypothesis that the community’s weakness, lack of leadership, can be combatted through the thoughtful application of mindfulness, dialogue, collaboration, and change; the Claremont Core. I also believe that the Capstone Action Project has established the means to create change within the community using Appreciative Inquiry and strengths-based leadership. These processes are expressed succinctly in this quote by Maya Angelou quote, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” Today as I write this paragraph I feel like my experience, formal education and desire for continuous improvement have combined into a coherent whole. I am ready and prepared to take the lead on important projects within my community and world.

Project Impact on the Stakeholders

The stakeholders have been inspired and encouraged to become a part of the change at the Junior High School. I have noticed that individuals are trying to think and behave more positively and go out of their way to report as such. It appears that the stakeholders were waiting for an opportunity, a bandwagon to jump on. There is something extraordinary to be a part of spreading the message of hope among the stakeholders.

Working on projects that have a positive impact on their students is empowering for stakeholders. The Dream Team will have the capacity to build on successes and newfound skills and strengths. The students are encouraged that they will have a voice in future programs and that they have a chance to change their school environment and thus their futures.

On a larger scale, building new and stronger relationships has taken place among staff, students, stakeholders and the leadership. Creating a school environment that fosters connectedness will inch us much closer to building a school climate where, “all members of the
school community feel safe, included and accepted and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions.” 33 Our Junior High Dream Team and all stakeholders will also benefit working toward, “Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect.” The Capstone Action Project has encouraged me to expand my circle of influence continuously and to always be on the lookout for “point people.” I have enjoyed working with the youth and am constantly encouraged by their receptivity. The enlarged challenge will be to continue my work within the community, with the stakeholders, those who may have more entrenched views and pessimistic opinions.

Assessment

The power of focusing on organizational strengths and positive action appears to be an idea whose time has arrived in my school and community. The three levels of change output have been accomplished through the Capstone Action Project. First, as the facilitator, I have embraced the newfound skill set discovered through my Master’s Program at Claremont Lincoln University. Mindfulness paved the way to a career change that was a much better fit for my personality, goals, dreams, and aspirations. Dialogue offered up the opportunity to seek conversation, opinions, and understanding in my new environment. Collaboration helped me form a hypothesis and developed mutual goals in the process of change.

By participating in this research process, the collaborative stakeholders experienced change by focusing on how their individual strengths could create a synergy that turns into

momentum to address concerns. Stakeholders are encouraged through conversation, teamwork and project success that measurable change can happen and that it is not a solo journey.

Stakeholders (including the youth) learned that they could be a part of the change, a larger movement. Finding solutions to complex issues within the school environment is no longer viewed as someone else’s problem to solve. The cycle of continuous learning and improvement can be applied to all future attempts.

The project weaknesses are 1) that there are so many good ideas, 2) it really takes time and energy to manage the various aspects of this project and 3) change in this instance requires a “heavy lift,” consistency and persistence.

Recommendations for Future Projects

The Junior High Dream Team will keep going, and the team wants to become a full-fledged nonprofit organization. Two future meetings are already scheduled; one of which is a lunchtime meeting to get input from all junior high students and to begin the process of electing the junior high student council next week. The stakeholders agreed to meet again in hopes to discuss their plans for future transitions, incentive days and the end-of-year 8th Grade promotion with the Principal. It will be exciting to see what the Dream Team looks like when the student body is fully integrated into its membership. Stakeholder participation in the Dream Team has created a general ease in contacting the school and feeling more welcome in the school environment.

The Summer School Collaboration Plan, completed in June was just fully funded for the 2018 school year. It is exciting to see a project that was minimally funded in the amount of $2000 become eligible for $20,000, that has the potential to impact more students in 2018. The
collaborative model and community participation were the highlights of the program while the
district will strengthen the potential for academic progress for students participating in the
Summer School next year.

The Mentoring Buddy Program exposed the potential of creating formal mentoring
relationships among students of all ages and the opportunity to introduce our students to basic
leadership theories and concepts as well as the values of ethical leadership. The Mentoring
Buddy Program also helped break down the invisible barrier that existed between Junior High
and High School students, showing that “appropriate” student relationships can be valuable in
creating a positive school climate. The Mentoring Buddy Project launch showed a glimpse of the
latent potential in the students helping one another. The environmental changes initiated by
school staff and the impromptu school wide clean up idea shows how stakeholder participation
can quickly initiate programs and create opportunities for community involvement and pride in
the schools.

Whew!

I recommend that we all stay tuned . . . .
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Orr, T. and M. Cleveland-Innes, “Appreciative Leadership: Supporting Education Innovation,”

*International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, Volume 16, Number 4, Pg. 236.


Ryan, J. Frank, et. al. “Appreciative Inquiry, using personal narratives to initiate school reform.”


APPENDIX A: Ethical Guidelines –

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Capstone Action Project Engaging Stakeholders in Promoting a Positive School Climate and Activating a Dream Team at the Junior High School

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kathy Trujillo, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts Ethical Leadership Degree Program at Claremont Lincoln University. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a stakeholder of a 7th or 8th Grade student attending the Junior High School.

- PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
Research suggests engaging stakeholders in the process of questions about possibilities, designing goals and creating innovative approaches maximized everyone’s potential. The research question is “Can positive social change (community pride and parent involvement) occur at the Junior High School by focusing and building upon current individual and organizational strengths?”

- PROCEDURES
If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a short on-line survey regarding your peak experiences in the school environment. You will have the option of attending up to three stakeholder meetings that will use the change methodology of Appreciative Inquiry to discuss school reform.

- POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
There are no known physical risk and/or discomforts involved in this research project. In the event of physical and/or mental injury resulting from participation in this research project, Claremont Lincoln University does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will CLU provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

- POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY
Positive school climate promotion has been a way to improve schools throughout our nation and globally. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions. This study will further the research in using strengths based leadership and Appreciative Inquiry in facilitating changes and engaging stakeholders in public school systems.

- CONFIDENTIALITY
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of anonymous survey participation and dis-identification of personal information in the final report.

- PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL
You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.
I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

________________________________________
Printed Name of Subject
________________________________________
Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Witness
Date

51
Appendix B: Stakeholder Collaboration Log

Collaboration Log Entries
## Collaboration Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Actions &amp; Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2016</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>A detailed discussion regarding Superintendent’s vision for the school district, students and academic performance. Discussed Bond Issue and campaign strategies. Outlined job description and work location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2016</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Discussed philosophical approaches to education, job description, and work location. Established open communication for problem-solving and student referrals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2016</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Provided orientation to the student body, introduction to high-risk students, internal protocols and established a collegial working relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 2016</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Student Council Advisor position, student body elections held, student input and program development, initiated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 2016</td>
<td>Teacher’s Meeting</td>
<td>All Staff &amp; Principal</td>
<td>Provided program overview, discussed current social/economic issues, student referrals, ideas, and visions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 2016</td>
<td>School Board Meeting</td>
<td>Board Members</td>
<td>Provided program overview, discussed social/economic issues, student referrals, ideals and visions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 2017</td>
<td>Deficient Senior Interventions</td>
<td>Six individual students</td>
<td>Discussed current academic issues, historic problems, social/economic issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 2017</td>
<td>Teacher’s Meeting</td>
<td>All Staff &amp; Principal, 1 Senior Student</td>
<td>Discussed historical academic issues, school engagement and climate problems, solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 2017</td>
<td>Teacher’s Meeting</td>
<td>All Staff &amp; Principal</td>
<td>Discussed data, academic problems and immediate solutions to include incentive program and after-school programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 2017</td>
<td>Meeting with Grant Writer</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Discussed data, testing information, found funding source, called state department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 2017</td>
<td>Meeting with School Board Member</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Discussed summer school concept. In favor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 2017</td>
<td>Meeting with Grant Writer</td>
<td>Myself, Colleague</td>
<td>Created budget and grant application to fund Safe School Professional Positions throughout the summer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>Dr. Ward</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Discussed the Summer School Capstone Action Project. Will need to select another project that does not rely on the students for research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Meeting with School Board</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Attended local school board meeting as part of highlighting positive happenings at the Junior High and High School. Talked about initiating a Positive School Climate Promotion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>Dr. Ward</td>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>Discussed the revising of the Capstone Action Project and the pros and cons of creating a shared vision. Decided that a Positive School Climate Promotion project might be better received by the administrators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>7th Grade Transition</td>
<td>Principal, teachers, students, myself</td>
<td>Created a transition plan for 6th-grade students to facilitate transition into Junior High. Invited students to participate in Summer School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2017</td>
<td>Summer School Program</td>
<td>Principal, teachers, students, community members, stakeholders</td>
<td>Began discussing the Positive School Promotion project with stakeholders to gauge receptivity and formulate an action plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2017</td>
<td>Open House Reception</td>
<td>Principal, teachers, students, school board, community members</td>
<td>Announced the formation of a Dream Team as an informal Parent-Teachers Association to facilitate school climate improvement. Painting of the Junior High hall commences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2017</td>
<td>Stakeholder engagement</td>
<td>All parents, guardians, caregivers of Junior High students</td>
<td>Began reaching out via Facebook messenger, in person and email to encourage responses to survey and an invitation to Dream Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Reviewed data received, shared with Principal and prepared a report to be given to School Board.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Presented the survey data and discussed Appreciative Inquiry as a change methodology.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Dream Team Meeting</td>
<td>Held inaugural Dream Team Meeting to begin the process of inquiry. Decided to work towards helping 7th graders transition into Junior High on the first day of school.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Principal approval of project</td>
<td>Met with the principal to discuss Dream Team and Mentoring Buddy Project. Developed survey for Back-to-School night.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Dream Team Meeting</td>
<td>Attendance doubled at Dream Team Meeting. Discussed mentoring program and additional ideas for future programming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>First contract day</td>
<td>Discussed Appreciative Inquiry, Dream Team and staff developed Clean-up Day idea. Agreed to promote as part of the Positive School Climate Promotion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Back-to-School Night</td>
<td>Presented mentoring program information to parents and students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>First day of School</td>
<td>Executed mentoring buddy program to help 7th graders transition into Junior High.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>First day of School</td>
<td>Facilitated ribbon cutting ceremony to commemorate new Junior High Hall.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Clean Up Day</td>
<td>Facilitated Clean-up Day at the high school prior to the first home football game of the season.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2017</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Discussed how the beginning of the school year was perceived, asked if the mentoring program was helpful, talked to students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2017</td>
<td>Stakeholders Meeting</td>
<td>Recognized and rewarded students for participating in the Mentoring Buddy Program. Discussed results of the program and formulated plan for continuation of the Junior High Dream Team.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: CAP Project Timeline
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Objective(s)</th>
<th>Stakeholder(s) Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 21</td>
<td>Develop Appreciative Inquiry Informational Brochure (Deliverable #1) and Parent Survey – Review with Administration – Mail</td>
<td>Superintendent, Principal, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 21 – August 4</td>
<td>Collect Parent Survey Data &amp; Collaborate with Stakeholders</td>
<td>Parents/guardians/caregivers, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 7</td>
<td>Correlate initial impressions – Review with Administration (Deliverable #2)</td>
<td>Superintendent, Principal, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9</td>
<td>Stakeholder Luncheon – Introduction to AI, unveiling of survey impressions, beginning of Dream Phase</td>
<td>Parents/guardians/caregivers, Superintendent, Principal, School Board members, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 16</td>
<td>Stakeholder Meeting – Second gathering to discuss Dream Phase – Creation of Dream Team (Deliverable #3). Consensus building on a project to undertake during the first 3 weeks of school. (Deliverable #4)</td>
<td>Parents/guardians/caregivers, Superintendent, Principal, School Board members, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 17</td>
<td>School Board presentation – “Focusing on the Good” Pep Talk, Stakeholder Report (Deliverable #5)</td>
<td>Dream Team, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21</td>
<td>First day of school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 23</td>
<td>Dream Team Meeting – Third gathering</td>
<td>Parents/guardians/caregivers, Superintendent, Principal, School Board members, Kathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21 – September 5</td>
<td>Execution of Positive School Climate Project (Deliverable #6)</td>
<td>Dream Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 17</td>
<td>End of Semester – Finish Master’s Program</td>
<td>Kathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Appreciative Inquiry Brochure
POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE CAPSTONE ACTION PROJECT

Junior High School 2017-2018

“The ageless essence of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in a way that make a system’s weaknesses irrelevant.” — Peter Drucker

Who?
Stakeholder Engagement
(Parents/Guardians/Caregivers of 7th and 8th Grade HJHS Students)

Research suggests, engaging stakeholders in the process of asking questions about possibilities, designing goals and creating innovative approaches maximizes everyone’s potential. The research question is “Can positive social change (community pride and parental involvement) occur at the Junior High School by focusing and building upon the current individual and organizational strengths?”

What?
Stakeholder Surveys & Meetings
Facilitating a change that focuses on the positive, wholesome and good things about the community and its members will take place through a series of surveys and collaborative meetings with the stakeholders. Appreciative Inquiry involves the “art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to heighten positive potential.” The positive framework of AI also produces a different “energy” when it comes to school reform.

When?
July 21 – August 23

The Capstone Action Project will commence on July 21st with a two-week information gathering/survey activity. Individuals interested in collaborating in person and being a part of the Dream Team will meet
on subsequent Wednesdays – August 9 and August 16. The final research and stakeholder project will end no later than September 17. The Dream Team will have the option of continuing with projects of their design throughout the year.

**Why?**

A positive learning and teaching environment is essential if students are to succeed in school.

Positive school climate promotion has been a way to improve schools throughout our nation and globally. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behavior.

**How?**

Appreciative Inquiry 5-D Cycle – “How can parents and guardians (and other stakeholders) lead a movement where each child in the world will be recognized as a valued resource to be developed instead of a problem to be solved?” Marakova

*Define* – Clarify the focus by setting an affirmative topic to explore. The process starts by clarifying what people want to inquire into (topic choice). The topic sets the agenda for learning, knowledge sharing, and action.

*Discover* – Appreciate the best by engaging all stakeholders in identifying strengths and best practices. Once the focus is clear, the process of discovery begins, looking for both past and present examples of desired states. The existing strengths create and help define the positive core.

*Dream* – Imagine the possibilities by creating a vision about discovered potential. Asking the question “what would we be like if we were our very best?” invokes a mental process of improvement and imagination.

*Design* – Determine the direction by designing an organization that magnifies the positive core. This phase is the time for the team to brainstorm multiple proposals and questions and mobilize resources. Imaging and describing shifts in systems, roles, resources and other existing structures is important in the design phase.

*Destiny* – Create the future by building hope and sustaining momentum. Once the team has designed strategies for moving forward, it is time to bring them into being. This part of the AI process is empowering as it encourages individuals to experiment with and reinforce what works.

**What’s Next?**

Review the letter that accompanied this brochure and answer the survey questions using the Survey Monkey electronic link, sending an email to the address below, mailing a paper response to the address below or by calling the number below:

**Contact**

Kathy Trujillo
P.O. Box 1748
Hawthorne, Nevada 89415

Cell: 775-316-0388
kathleen.trujillo@claremontlincoln.edu
Appendix E: Invitation to Participate
July 24, 2017

Dear Parents/Guardians:

You are being invited to participate in a study designed to focus on the organizational strengths of the Hawthorne Junior High School. I am conducting this research as part of my Capstone Action Project to be submitted to Claremont Lincoln University for the Master of Arts Ethical Leadership Degree Program.

The research question we will be answering is “Can positive social change (community pride and parental involvement) occur at Hawthorne Junior High School by focusing and building upon current individual and organizational strengths?” This project is being supervised by Dr. Stan Ward, Dean of Capstone Studies at CLU. Dr. Ward has a Ph.D. in Leadership Studies and was also an instructor and administrator at the Brook Hill School in Bullard, Texas.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and is also anonymous unless you choose to provide your name and contact information at the end of the survey. All information gathered and shared will not contain any names or identifying information. If you are interested in participating, please access the survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MGQP975. You may also complete the paper survey attached to this correspondence and send to the P.O. Box above or scan and email to either email address. The process can take as little as 5 minutes and provides information about peak educational experiences and will identify the Jr. High School’s positive core. The survey will close on Monday, August 7 at midnight.

In addition, your participation in a Jr. High Dream Team is requested whether choose to answer the survey or not. The Dream Team will meet to explore ways to start the 2017-2018 school year on a positive note and talk about ideas to recognize our Jr. High students and help them reach their full potential.

I am hopeful that you will want to be included in this research project and be a part of a positive change revolution at the Hawthorne Jr. High School. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Kathy Trujillo
Appendix F: Appreciative Inquiry Survey Results and Question Formation Analysis
Appreciative Inquiry Survey Question Rationale

Questions that help assess the respondents’ ability to understand the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry. Based on the work of Innovation Partners International as presented in the dissertation of Pamela Lynn Buchanan, California State University, San Bernardino.

1) Collaborative Capacity: The ability to invite, engage and involve many (in a positive way) in a conversation about what matters; the ability to create an environment where people are willing to share their thinking, listen to other points of view and move into action together.

2) Affirmative Capacity: The habit of seeing the world with an appreciative eye; to notice and articulate what is good, healthy, constructive and life giving.

3) Reframing Capacity: The ability to seek out and study a new frame or worldview; to be open to new concepts, ideas, perspectives, and possibilities.

4) Emergent Capacity: To live in the present moment; to be able to remain open to allow possibilities to emerge.

5) Potential Capacity: The ability to see the positive possibilities that are resident for oneself, others, a group/team, organization, or community.
Appreciative Inquiry Survey Questions and Results

I look for the best in a difficult situation – Reframing Capacity

Q1
I look for the best in a difficult situation.

Answer choices:
- strongly disagree: 6.67% (1)
- disagree: 6.67% (1)
- agree: 53.33% (8)
- strongly agree: 33.33% (5)
- Other (please specify): 0.00% (0)

Total: 15

Q2
I recognize that others see things differently than I do – Reframing Capacity

Answer choices:
- strongly disagree: 0.00% (0)
- disagree: 0.00% (0)
- agree: 53.33% (8)
- strongly agree: 46.67% (7)
- Other (please specify): 0.00% (0)

Total: 15
I use more positive statements than negative statements – Affirmative Capacity

Q3
I use more positive statements than negative statements.

Answered: 15, Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I believe in myself even when others do not – Affirmative Capacity

Q4
I believe in myself even when others do not.

Answered: 15, Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>20.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I take responsibility for the choices I make – Collaborative Capacity

Q5
I take responsibility for the choices I make.
Answered: 15  Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>26.67% 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>73.33% 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have a strong self-awareness; I know my skills, abilities, beliefs, and behaviors – Collaborative Capacity

Q6
I have strong self-awareness; I know my skills, abilities, beliefs, and behaviors.
Answered: 15  Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>46.67% 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>53.33% 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00% 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I trust my intuition in times of uncertainty – Emergent Capacity

Without being modest what is it that you most value about yourself? – Potential Capacity

**07**

I trust my intuition in times of uncertainty.

**09**

Without being modest what is it that you most value about yourself?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strongly disagree</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagree</td>
<td>13.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agree</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strongly agree</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL**

15

Showing 15 responses

- Kind hearted
  - View respondent’s answers
- I always look at every situation from every point of view.
  - View respondent’s answers
- My involvement in my kids lives and activities.
  - View respondent’s answers
- I don’t mince words. I’m very straightforward but also very willing to help or correct a problem. I believe if you see a problem then you should always look for a solution.
  - View respondent’s answers
- Honesty. Effort in almost everything I do.
  - View respondent’s answers
Peak Experience Storytelling — Describe a time when you were in school when you felt the most hopeful, valued and successful. If there was a particular staff teacher or staff member who inspired that feeling you may name them.

Creating a compelling vision for the future and imagining person contributions to that vision — Imagine your student(s) on graduation day when everything is just as you always wished it could be. How is it different? How have you contributed to this dream organization? If you are interested in being part of a Dream Team please list your name and contact information. Thank you!

Q10

Imagine your student(s) on graduation day when everything is just as you always wished it could be. How is it different? How have you contributed to this dream organization? If you are interested in being part of a Dream Team please list your name and contact information. Thank you!

Answered: 10  Skipped: 5
Appendix G: Presentation to School Board of Trustees
Presentation
to Mineral County
Board of School Trustees

Positive School
Climate Promotion –
Activating a Dream Team

By

Kathy Trujillo
Capstone Action Research Project
Claremont Lincoln University
August 10, 2017

The Plan
The plan is to use the strengths-based framework of Appreciative Inquiry to engage the Junior High School’s stakeholders in discussing what is right with the school and what we can do to build upon the existing positive attributes within the school. The goal will be to select one project that can be completed by a group of stakeholders to start the school year off on a positive trajectory.

The hope is that this work will create a sustainable organization that can assist the School Board, Principal, teachers, staff, and students in promoting positive activities throughout the school year. Stakeholders will be invited to focus on the positive aspects of Hawthorne Junior High and generate ideas on ways to amplify those strengths.

The Process
The process began with an introduction to the Appreciative Inquiry process to the parents/guardians/caregivers of Junior High Students. This brochure outlined the science behind strengths-based organizational development. The stakeholders were then asked to participate in a ten-question survey that helps determine readiness for change and asks respondents to think about and describe a peak school experience.

This activity sets the foundation and seeds for change within the individual and the family setting. Focusing on individual strengths and peak experiences create receptivity and positive space to consider a brighter future. The scientific pretense is that the quality of the answer you receive is based on how the question is framed. An invitation to participate in the Junior High Dream Team was included as part of the survey.

The Survey Results
The survey was mailed to 70 stakeholders. Three surveys were returned due to insufficient address making the baseline population 67. The survey was open for a two-week period ending August 9th. The survey received a 23% response rate, and the results are listed below: (omitted from this Appendix to save space).

34 T. Orr and M. Cleveland-Innes, “Appreciative Leadership: Supporting Education Innovation,” International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, Volume 16, Number 4, Pg. 236.
Working Definition of School Climate – The Goal

“A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted and actively promote positive behaviors and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. A positive school climate is a crucial component of the prevention of inappropriate behavior.” 35

Activating the Dream Team

The inaugural meeting of the Hawthorne Junior High Dream Team was held on August 9th. The team is open to all stakeholders (which is anyone with a vested interest in Junior High School students). In attendance were a dozen participants consisting of parents, grandparents, certified staff members, classified staff members, a 6th-grade student, a 11th-grade student, the high school counselor and myself.

The Dream Team selected a project to work on based on the input from a 6th Grade student and collaborative input from the rest of the team members. The team agreed to meet again next week, and the principal gave a “thumbs up” to the team’s project concept the following day.

Executing a successful first-day experience for the Junior High students will be the first “win” for the Dream Team and will provide the positive push for the group to continue meeting, discussing and dreaming.

Intangibles

The transformational potential of Appreciative Inquiry and focusing on individual and organizational strengths offers an opportunity to reframe historic and habitual thought processes within the family unit, schools, and community. Success within the schools is “heavily influenced by connections between school, family, and community.” 36

Conclusion

The Capstone Action Project and the now activated Hawthorne Junior High Dream Team has the potential to create the energy to find viable solutions for ongoing positive school climate promotion. Through developing a shared vision, joint service efforts, collaboration, and unification the educational community will have a resource that can reduce personal expenses and help everyone reach shared goals.

Figure 1 – Diary of a Capstone Project

DIARY OF A CAPSTONE PROJECT

Kathy Trujillo

Mindfulness & Behavior-Based Safety
Take a Recess from Stress
Summer School Collaboration Project
Positive School Climate Promotion
Activating a Dream Team
Figure 2 – Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 3 – Forbes’ Hierarchy of Learning
Figure 4 – Capstone Action Project Communication Methods Flowchart

Capstone Action Project Methods Flowchart

COLLABORATIVE CONVERSATIONS AND PROCESSES

- Conversations with Educational Leaders and Board Members
- Teacher’s Meetings and Discussions with Staff Members
- Student Engagement, Conversations, and Interactions
- Development of Shared Goals
- "Dream Team" Meetings & Conversational Opportunities
- Discussions with Parents, Grandparents, and Community Members
- Direct Mailing of Informational Literature and Paper Surveys to Stakeholders
- "Dream Team" Social Media Facebook Page
- Community Engagement Through Newspaper Articles
- Newspaper Articles
- Direct Mailing of Informational Literature and Paper Surveys to Stakeholders

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