Appreciative Inquiry & Strengths-Based Leadership
Activating a “Dream Team” for Hawthorne Junior High School
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What I Did

• Asked this question regarding an underperforming Junior High School: “Can positive social change occur by focusing on individual and organizational strengths?”
• Invited stakeholder participation in envisioning a positive school environment by building a Dream Team
• Discussed and recalled peak experiences in a similar environment to stimulate positive dialogue.

Why I Did It

• Focusing on the negative attributes within the school climate was not creating change but hopelessness.
• Appreciative Inquiry, strengths-based leadership and positive psychology offered a new and different approach to problem solving.
• Creating a positive “bandwagon” for stakeholders to jump on created a catalyst for positive change.
• Experiencing success in the stakeholder group created more opportunities for leadership and program development.

What We Accomplished

CHANGE FOR ME
The Capstone Research Project “thrust” me into a leadership role. It felt good to be part of an organic research project that could create positive change within my work environment. I could see progress all around me and a broad impact.

CHANGE FOR PARTICIPANTS
Parents and students were also placed into leadership roles...some for the first time in their lives. The positive interactions helped them “see” themselves in new ways. Every Board Member of the Dream Team has seen positive progress in their professional lives as well.

CHANGE FOR THE PROBLEM
The Dream Team has created an atmosphere of positive change. The school developed a core group of volunteers that they can count on to help promote activities, pitch in as needed and support projects.

Who I Worked With

• I worked with all stakeholders. This included the School Board, Superintendent, teachers, parents/grandparents, families and classified staff. The unique composition of the stakeholders group created a unique collaborative environment and opportunities for perspective building.

Key References


Bonus - Sustainability
The Capstone Action Program and creation of the Dream Team is developing into a sustainable stakeholders group within the school that continues to focus on individual and organizational strengths.