



Strength-based Reform – A Primer

Focusing on Strengths – The world is changing rapidly, demanding that we re-think the nature and purpose of education. Strength-based thinking assumes that every student, classroom, and school have untapped stories of excellence and that telling these stories releases positive energy and inspires creativity. Strength-based thinking believes that a maximum mix of school community stakeholders lead to the best results. Strength-based thinking increases resilience and capacity to overcome challenges.

So What is Strength-Based Thinking? – Strength-based thinking is both content and process. It is both science and art. Think about a time when someone really believed in you and saw your strengths. It could have been a teacher, a family member, or friend who recognized your unique gifts. How did their faith and expectations affect you? Did you feel more energized and excited about possibilities? Strength-based thinking discovers the possible by emphasizing what is working right now. By focusing on strengths – what’s working in our schools – you will have an opportunity to show that teacher driven change is critical to school improvement.

Strength-Based Approaches and Appreciative Inquiry – By applying for a CTA IFT Grant you can create and support a teaching and learning environment that adheres to the key principles of strength-based thinking. Because most school reform strategies are based on a problem-centered approach, you have a unique opportunity to explore how strength-based thinking can improve student success. Although strength-based approaches have been applied in many public and private settings, its application to schools has been infrequent. However, one important strength-based approach, Appreciative Inquiry, has been found to produce positive results for students.

For more information go to: <http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/display/Search?moduleId=14258287&searchQuery=appreciative+inquiry>

Strength-Based Approaches and Positive Deviance – Focusing on positive student behaviors - rather than disruptive behaviors – is a strength-based approach worth exploring. Too often, we spend time and resources on fixing disruptive behaviors in the classroom and less attention on desirable behaviors. By identifying, publicizing, and acting on behavioral strategies that lead to success, you can have a major impact on school improvement and real innovation. Positive Deviance is a strength-based strategy that focuses on positive behaviors – behaviors that can be identified by students, parents, and teachers that lead to desirable outcomes.

For more information go to:

<http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/display/Search?moduleId=14258287&searchQuery=positive+deviance>

Below are a few examples of how teacher driven, strength-based Grants can be developed and applied to student success:

Chapter Grants – Are you interested in taking a more district-wide approach in your CTA IFT grant proposal? Do you want to involve teachers with other school-community stakeholders? Is there a role for your local association in the CTA IFT grant process?

Go to <http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/past-grant-recipients> to find out how local chapters have been involved in the CTA IFT grant process.

Educator Grants - What ways can you apply teacher driven strength-based change to testing, standards, and student outcomes? How have CTA IFT grants been used to explore one-on-one student-teacher relationships, classroom practices and procedures, and school community relations? Are there strength-based CTA IFT grants that have focused on student talents and strengths to create a school culture of success?

Go to <http://www.teacherdrivenchange.org/past-grant-recipients> to find out how educators and educator teams have been involved in the CTA IFT grant process.

School Community Gardens - School community gardens bring together students, parents, teachers, classified staff, administrators, and community leaders to create a teaching and learning environment filled with passion, excitement, and joy. Planning, developing, implementing, and maintaining school community gardens requires a diverse set of skills and knowledge that can be integrated within the curriculum. A Grant on a school community garden can create a new context for school improvement through the utilization of teacher, parent, staff, and most of all student strengths and talents.

Go to <http://teacherdrivenchange.squarespace.com/storage/Summary-%202010%20Mini%20Grant%20Educator%20Winners.pdf> to find out more about school community gardens.

Identifying Positive Strengths and Great Experiences to Build a Culture of Success – A quick and easy way to acquire strength-based information is through Appreciative Inquiry Interviews. Interviews can take place between and among students, teachers, parents, and staff. Interview questions can identify personal strengths, great experiences, and the practices and procedures that are working in your classroom, school and district. For example, instead of concentrating on why something is not working, focus your energy and attention on the great things taking place. Through a Grant on Appreciative Inquiry Interviews you can quickly gather information on why things work, what strategies are successful, and how you can build on the success that is taking place all around you.

Go to <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/practice/organization.cfm?sector=25> to find out how Appreciative Inquiry Interviews can be used to create a culture of success.

Teacher-Parent Conferences – Teacher-parent conferences can be an opportunity to emphasize weaknesses or student strengths. Weaknesses are the activities that result in frustration and unimportance. Strengths create opportunities and possibilities for success. There are three kinds of strengths: Activity Strengths (the things you do that energize you), Relationship Strength (the things you do with and for others that make you feel energized and proud) and Learning Strengths (the ways that learning makes the most sense to you). All of these strengths are discoverable and can be developed. A Grant on strength-based teacher-parent conferences will reveal new strategies for increasing parent involvement.

The web site below provides excellent information on strength-based teacher-parent conferences and relationships:

<http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/publications-resources?topic=3>

Additional Resources

www.appreciativeinquiry.org is the web address for the Appreciative Inquiry Commons, the official home and nexus for the AI community. It comprises many stories, documents, and links.

www.iisd.org/ai/locating.htm is a link to the introduction of a book by Charles Elliott, An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry: Locating the Energy for Change. This introduction tells two powerful stories of teenage boys heading for trouble and contrasts the problem solving and the appreciative approaches. In addition, the entire book is available as a free download from this site.

www.teacherdrivenchange.org/display/Search?moduleId=14258287&searchQuery=strength-based is a link to a variety of useful resources on strength-based thinking.