

California Teachers Association Institute for Teaching  
*Creating a Culture of High School Success – From the Inside Out*  
*Appreciative Inquiry Student and Parent Interview Study*

The California Teachers Association Institute for Teaching (CTA IFT) conducted a study, partially funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, to investigate the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the highest performing African American and Latino students and their parents within seven of California's lowest performing high schools. The purpose of this study was to uncover the underlying reasons why these students were academically and socially successful and use this information to develop a culture of success for all high school students. It was hoped that this approach to school change would reveal new perspectives on high school improvement to yield the necessary knowledge, skills, and tools to transform the culture of our high schools.

While most reform efforts have been designed around external change strategies, this investigation was driven from the *inside out* with the goal of revealing those factors students and their parents believed promoted a high school culture of success. Specifically, this study examined what respondents appreciated and valued about the overall operating procedures and practices of their high school so as to develop a more accurate image of what a successful academic and social culture might look like for all students. By identifying certain cultural factors that are predisposed to a more successful learning environment, the value of various school improvement initiatives may be enhanced.

### HIGH SCHOOL REFORM

Attempts to reform or *fix* high schools have not been lacking. Over the past 20 years millions of public and private dollars have supported hundreds of school reform movements in curriculum, instruction, professional development, and school organizational structure (i.e. smaller learning communities). These efforts have led to a depressed high school climate where teachers and other school community stakeholders are frustrated and often skeptical about any new reform proposals. Traditional approaches (e.g., self-studies, strategic planning, assessment and evaluation, etc.) too often examine what's not working in our high schools: identifying problems or deficits and often affixing blame to one or more stakeholder groups. When using a problem-solving or deficit approach or model it is assumed that something is broken or fragmented. However, problem solving, which works well for linear mechanistic systems, has not necessarily been found to be successful for highly complex, large social systems.

By definition, problem-solving implies that one is familiar with or driven by a specific ideal; thus research and resulting interventions have been guided by an instrumental purpose tied to what is already known. In other words, problem-solving or deficit thinking has been grounded in the reality which surrounds the problems. Recognizing the symbolic and socially

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constructed nature of our high schools, efforts to improve our schools in any dramatic way cannot be programmed, unilaterally determined, or externally directed in any material way. Efforts over the past several years to fix high school operations and procedures have generally been unsuccessful suggesting it may be necessary to take a more inventive and creative approach to high school change; one emphasizing existing assets and strengths. To do this, however, requires an intentional detachment from existing problems so as to increase individual and stakeholder capacity to invent and create. This study adapted the Appreciative Inquiry process or strength-based thinking to the basic tenets of Harrison's (2006; 2006a) *Culture Matters Research Project* to discover a new approach to creating a culture of success for all students. An outgrowth of more than 20 years of research, the *Culture Matters Research Project* has examined the role culture plays in societal development and progress around the world.

### APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) suggests that improvement is more engaging, fun, and effective when the emphasis is on what is working rather than what is broken. By focusing on strengths and assets, greater possibilities exist and transformational change is more likely. Carl Jung, the Swiss psychotherapist, described strength – based thinking as follows:

*All of the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble. They can never be solved, but only outgrown. Some higher or wider interest appeared on the horizon and through this broadening of outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge.*

The AI investigative process encourages individual imagination and social capacity to create and invent new realities. By paying special attention to the best of what exists, AI provides a framework not found in the pragmatic, problem-solving mode of action - research. Specifically, two characteristics are key to AI's transformational nature: (1) an interpersonal investigation of what people think and say in relationship to their strengths and positive experiences and (2) ongoing conversations around personal and collective strengths and positive experiences which stimulate new ideas and possibilities. These two characteristics suggest an alternative design for how change can be planned and implemented. By emphasizing affirmative over deficit methods, we may be more likely to increase our ability to identify factors leading to productive, sustainable high school change.

### CULTURE AND SUCCESS

Harrison (1997) described culture as a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes that guide the actions of individuals and the interaction of people within a society. Harrison (1997, 2006) defined values and beliefs as norms of behavior to which a society attaches importance, and attitudes as ways in which people learn to respond to facts, circumstances, and issues. While others (Boas, 1948; Herskovits, 1973; Kaplan, 1964.) have treated culture as neutral and value free, Harrison (1997) has concluded that certain cultural factors are predisposed to human progress. Based on Harrison's (2006) research there are specific cultural patterns that are more likely to act as a foundation for creating a more successful, just, and prosperous society. Harrison (2006) has

set forth a highly descriptive schematic for understanding the role culture plays in societal advancement, and how strategically, we can change and direct cultural shifts from the inside out. He identified progressive cultural factors as (1) a high degree of identification and trust between the family and the community, (2) a rigorous ethical system, (3) a democratic and egalitarian life style, and (4) a creative, innovative, and future orientation. Based on this foundation, AI questions were developed to reveal student and parent strength-based thinking around factors that they believed were driving a culture of success. Below is a summary of the logic behind the construction of the AI interview questions:

- A. The questions encouraged students and parents to construct their own stories about what a *culture of success* would look like in their high schools. Therefore, they are open-ended and broad-based.
- B. The questions encouraged the change process. The questions sparked and directed student and parent attention and energy toward what a *culture of success* would look like in their high schools. Therefore, questions focused on all aspects of the high school, including the classroom, student, the curriculum, and teachers.
- C. The questions encouraged images and stories that inspired action. The questions did not limit student and parent thinking and set no boundaries for what a *culture of success* should look like.
- D. The questions were all written to solicit affirmative responses. Positive questions helped to unleash enthusiasm, excitement, and hope and positive action. Therefore, the questions provided a positive roadmap for high school change initiatives.

### AI INTERVIEWS

Student and parent AI interviews were conducted at seven of California’s lowest performing high schools for the purpose of identifying what is *right* about our high schools, classrooms, subjects, teachers, other students, their parents and their families. This study began with the highest performing African American and Latino students (Based on student grade point average) and their parent interviews at seven of California’s lowest performing high schools. See Table 1 for student and parent demographics. Students interviewed students and parents interviewed parents. See Exhibits 1 and 2 for a list of the student and parent AI questions.

Table 1: Student and Parent Demographics

Demographic Group	Student or Parent	Number
African American	Student	48
African American	Parent	34
Latino	Student	370
Latino	Parent	336
Other	Student	9
Other	Parent	17

Immediately following each interview session, parents and students participated in a facilitated feedback meeting to summarize their responses to each question. After listening to each other, participants were asked to organize their ideas around the following categories: (1) High school environment, (2) The classroom environment, (3) Student and parent values, beliefs and attitudes and (4) Teaching and learning.

Several days after the initial interviews occurred, between 5 and 10 follow-up interviews were conducted at each high school with students and parents who had participated in the original AI interviews. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to collect in-depth information on the forces driving a high school *culture of success*. See Exhibits 3 and 4 for the follow-up student and parent questions.

## RESULTS

A content analysis (See Exhibits 5 and 6) was performed to identify what factors promoted a culture of success for all high school students and parents. Student and parent affirmative responses were examined, organized, and categorized based on the seminal work of Harrison (2006) and Harrison and Huntington (2000) which described how values, beliefs, and attitudes help shape human progress and how individual and group success can be influenced and directed by public policy. Based on the content of analysis of student and parent interviews, responses were organized around 7 factors:

1. Focusing on the Future
2. Strengthening the Work Ethic
3. Expanding Family-School Relations
4. Strengthening the Social Ethic
5. Valuing Child Rearing Practices
6. Encouraging System-Wide Thinking
7. Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment

To examine these factors in greater detail, school stakeholders (teachers, CTA local leaders and staff, school and district administrators, and CTA IFT staff) were invited to a meeting to develop guiding principles in support of a high school culture of success. Stakeholders were asked to create guiding principles based on the AI framework for constructing provocative propositions. Provocative propositions are statements that bridge the best of *what is* with personal speculation or intuition of *what might be*. Guiding principles were considered to be provocative if they created new mental models or images of the future. Stakeholders stretched and challenged current high school cultural assumptions and practices to create real and desired possibilities for our high schools. A total of 21 guiding principles were developed.

Following the school stakeholder meeting, a Student and Parent Summit took place. The 28 students and 27 parents attending the Summit came from the pool of students and parents who participated in the initial student and parent AI Interviews. During the first part of the Summit, participants developed 12 additional guiding principles to the set generated

at the school stakeholder meeting. The complete set of guiding principles, by factor, is listed below in Figure 1.

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### **Figure 1: Guiding Principles for a High School Culture of Success**

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#### **Focusing on the Future**

- 1) Students are goal orientated and see a positive future strengthened by a school environment where all learning and teaching reflects real work experiences.
- 2) Students admire success in themselves and others. To increase student success and to challenge, support and encourage each student, the school provides a community of mentors.
- 3) Students enjoy challenges and work hard to achieve their goals. Therefore, the school and community acknowledge, encourage and support each child's ambitions.
- 4) Students have a vision of the future. Parents reassure their student's future. Parents support their children by devoting their energy & time to their children.

#### **Strengthening the Work Ethic**

- 5) Students enjoy being challenged and work hard to reach goals. Therefore, the school community has aligned its learning goals to address student's individual goals.
- 6) Competition in the classroom better prepares students for real life. Competition helps students do well in everything – not just school.
- 7) The student's work ethic improves by having faith within themselves, challenging their work abilities, evaluating their work strengths, and setting good study habits. By participating in groups, students are able to identify each other's strengths and work ethics.

#### **Expanding Family-School Relations**

- 8) The family and high school have established a meaningful and personal connection.
- 9) A communication system that nurtures collaboration (home visits, weekend activities and action centers) and an open door policy for the schools.
- 10) All students and families feel committed and connected to the school site as well as to each member of the staff and vice versa by having an advisory program for parents and students based on positive learning skills.
- 11) All students and families feel committed and connected to the school site as well as to each member of the staff and vice versa by having teachers sending to five parents each week a positive message regarding their child's positive qualities.

- 12) All students and families feel committed and connected to the school site as well as to each member of the staff and vice versa by having students in advisory classes at school.
- 13) Schools do everything in their power to encourage parent involvement and assure that each student receives the caring support a functional family provides.

### **Strengthening the Social Ethic**

- 14) Students and parents participate in a positive atmosphere that promotes a caring, supportive and respectful environment where their ideas and actions are valued.
- 15) Schools are giving support to students that come from different cultures and religions so they are more motivated to succeed in life and learn other new cultures.

### **Valuing Child Rearing Practices**

- 16) Parents ask and respond to their children about their progress and successes, expect honesty and respect, encourage students to overcome obstacles, dream of a better life for their children, pay attention to their children, have high expectations, and give them support.
- 17) Parents and their children have an ongoing relationship that is supportive of education and involves constant interaction.
- 18) Parents care how their students act at school, monitor the behaviors they demonstrate that promote success, and are involved at each step of the educational process in their child's life.
- 19) Families are empowered, believing child rearing is a number one priority including instilling values, developing a work ethic, and showing support.
- 20) All families spend significant amounts of time each day interacting with their children about life's activities: school, work, feelings, and challenges.
- 21) School staff members value parents and child rearing by listening to parent needs and come to families in a spirit of cooperation. Within the school – family setting, dialogue among families, students, teachers, and all staff is meaningful and results oriented.

### **Encouraging System-Wide Thinking**

- 22) Students and parents participate in a connected, safe learning community where ALL school community stakeholders support a respectful, trusting, and collaborative relationship with one another. When everything is connected things make sense for everyone.
- 23) Family and teachers encourage students to have positive attitudes and look on the bright side by showing that they believe in the student.

- 24) Family and teachers give personal attention by building strong relationships and overlooking mistakes.

### **Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment**

- 25) Students are treated as respected individuals and are connected to their teachers, cared for, and communicated with about all aspects of their education.
- 26) The community is connected to the school, students, and teachers. Through these connections teachers are nurturing: they listen, they lead, they follow and they create possibilities every day. As a result, students are safe, there is freedom of expression, rules are enforced, and all are supported.
- 27) Schools are a community of caring stakeholders where communication and learning are an ongoing process. All students have a professional relationship with each of their teachers and administrators.
- 28) All students are in classrooms with passionate, caring teachers who help students see relationships between learning and real world experiences.
- 29) Teachers show personal interest and give positive feedback to their students so that students not only succeed in their classes, but also in life. The students are motivated to please their teachers as well as their family members.
- 30) Teachers have a good relationship with students by communicating and creating activities that involve both parties. Through teacher reassurances, students continue to do their best. Students are praised for their success with regular ceremonies so that their efforts are acknowledged. When students are encouraged they will keep trying to succeed.
- 31) The environment is free of negative influences where students reach for their goals and accomplish their dreams.
- 32) Teachers encourage students to do their best causing them to know what they want to be in the future, take pride in their school, and know that somebody supports them.
- 33) Caring teachers show they have high expectations for students by encouraging them to do well and helping them achieve success on assignments.

### Prioritizing Guiding Principles for a High School Culture of Success

For the second part of the Summit, students and parents were asked to assess each guiding principle from two different contexts: (1) *What our school community should look like in the future?* and (2) *What our school community looks like now?* Within each context students and parents were asked to respond to each guiding principle by indicating:

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

While differences existed between what students and parents felt our high school community *should look like in the future* and what our high school community *looks like now*, most individuals strongly agreed or agreed with the set of guiding principles. For purposes of this study, the top two guiding principles were identified. In order to prioritize the top guiding principles, the summated strongly agree and agree scores for the contexts, *what our school community should look like in the future* and *what our school community looks like now* were calculated. Consistent with AI, only the affirmative scores were considered in the tabulation.

#### Top Guiding Principles

For the factor, ***Focusing on the Future***, the guiding principle *students have a vision of the future. Parents reassure their student's future. Parents support their children by devoting their energy & time to their children* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was the guiding principle *students admire success in themselves and others. To increase student success and to challenge, support and encourage each student, the school provides a community of mentors.*

For the factor, ***Strengthening the Work Ethic***, the guiding principle *student's work ethic improves by having faith within themselves, challenging their work abilities, evaluating their work strengths, and setting good study habits. By participating in groups, students are able to identify each other's strengths and work ethics,* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was the guiding principle *students enjoy being challenged and work hard to reach goals. Therefore, the school community has aligned its learning goals to address student's individual goals.*

For the factor, ***Expanding Family-School Relations***, the guiding principle *the family and high school have established a meaningful and personal connection* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was the guiding principle *all students and families feel committed and connected to the school site as well as to each member of the staff and vice versa by having students in advisory classes at school.*

For the factor, ***Strengthening the Social Ethic***, the guiding principle *students and parents participate in a positive atmosphere that promotes a caring, supportive and respectful environment where their ideas and actions are valued* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was *schools are giving support to students that come from different cultures and religions so they are more motivated to succeed in life and learn other new cultures.*

For the factor, ***Valuing Child Rearing Practices***, the guiding principle *parents ask and respond to their children about their progress and successes, expect honesty and respect, encourage students to overcome obstacles, dream of a better life for their children, pay attention to their children, have high expectations, and give them support* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was *parents care how their students act at school, monitor the behaviors they demonstrate that promote success, and are involved at each step of the educational process in their child's life.*

For the factor, ***Encouraging System-Wide Thinking***, the guiding principle *family and teachers encourage students to have positive attitudes and look on the bright side by showing that they believe in the student* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was *students and parents participate in a connected, safe learning community where ALL school community stakeholders support a respectful, trusting, and collaborative relationship with one another. When everything is connected things make sense for everyone.*

For the factor, ***Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment***, the guiding principle *caring teachers show they have high expectations for students by encouraging them to do well and helping them achieve success on assignments* was found to have the highest score as reported by students and parents. Ranked second was *students are treated as respected individuals and are connected to their teachers, cared for, and communicated with about all aspects of their education.*

## DISCUSSION

The views expressed by students and their parents in this study were consistent with the research of Harrison (2006) that there are certain cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes that are more likely to promote personal and societal success. By using a strength-based design, students and parents were willing to share the school community experiences they believed to be most pertinent to academic and social achievement. The AI process was found to encourage student and parents conversations that were both proactive and affirmative. Respondents rarely offered negative or critical comments about their high school experiences and were very responsive to the AI interview process.

Past efforts to close the achievement gap for African American and Latino students have generally been driven by strategic and structured deficit-based planning and decision-making models. Educational change agents have been concerned with coherent approaches that have been designed to achieve state and federally mandated objectives. As a result, high school improvement initiatives have been prescriptive and problem-centered. The brief discussion below provides a summary of how each of the seven factors generated from this study established an important asset-based foundation to assist students both academically and socially.

### Focusing on the Future

Emphasizing the future has been found to be closely related to high school academic and social success. Future orientation is important for adolescents as it is related to decisions about their education, career, and family (Nurmi, 1991). For example, Zimbardo & Boyd (1999) reported that grade point average and hours of studying per week were positively related to future orientation. Others found that students' future expectations were positively related to school adjustment and school membership (Voelkl, 1997). Student and parent results in this study indicated that they were able to look into the future and visualize success. AI suggests that individuals co-create the future through their relationships and behaviors. At both the interpersonal and institutional levels, the data collected showed that students and parents actively created an image of a future filled with optimism and hope. A major assumption of AI is that positive images will lead to positive action (Cooperrider, &

Whitney, 2005). Consistent with this thinking, Garbarino, (1999) Co-Director of the Family Life Development Center, at Cornell University, believes that a strong future orientation can overcome the challenges of poverty and racism. Garbarino (1999) also suggests that school community support is critical if students are to keep their hopes and dreams alive for a productive and successful life.

A powerful future orientation is an important factor that needs to be considered by teachers in their classroom. For example, if teachers want to learn why certain high school students have little faith or hope about their future, an investigation of gang members, dropouts, and students who have failed would be instructive. But if teachers want to learn why certain high school students are filled with hopes and dreams for the future, investigating failing students will not be very informative. To discover why certain students think about their future, it may be more productive for teachers to investigate successful students; their values, beliefs, and attitudes.

#### Strengthening the Work Ethic

Interview results characterized a strong work ethic as a student's desire to academically and socially succeed. Specifically, a strong work ethic was more likely to exist when: (1) Students have internalized a sense of self-worth, (2) Clear and precise study habits were understood and practiced, and (3) Student goals were supported by parents, teachers, and the school community. Also, emphasized was the importance of student engagement with peers that were academically and socially successful. Results were consistent with past research (Buchholz, 1978; Ford & Herren, 1995) that defined work ethics as reliability and trustworthiness, willingness to learn, responsibility for one's actions, and willingness to work cooperatively.

Buckingham (2007) has found that most individuals do not come close to making full use of their talents in the workplace with only 17 percent of the workforce believing they use all of their strengths on the job. One explanation may be that not enough attention has been placed on individual talents and strengths in the schooling process. The guiding principles generated in this study may provide a useful framework for teachers to respond to this condition by focusing on student assets over deficits in the classroom.

To do this, teaching and learning needs to be designed to provide students the opportunity to explore and develop a successful work orientation – one which reinforces their strengths. By emphasizing direct knowledge and practice, as well as positive vicarious experiences, students may be able to internalize the habits, dispositions, and skills necessary for a strong work ethic. In other words, by having each student focus on their strengths and talents, they are more likely to feel empowered and gain the necessary confidence and drive to succeed. For this to happen however, the school community must fully appreciate the potential in every youngster while every student must internalize the belief that through hard work they can maximize their strengths and be successful.

#### Expanding Family-School Relations

High schools want parent support but seldom seek out parental thinking on curriculum issues, questions of policy, and teaching and learning. While teachers attempt to increase communications with parents, it is often assumed that by the time their children have

reached high school most parents have lost interest. The *schizophrenic* nature of family-school relationships has led to a state of ambivalence where school officials want parent involvement but only at arms length. Parents also remain generally aloof, indicating that the high school has the primary responsibility to prepare their children academically and socially for adulthood.

Results for this study found that students and parents positively deviated from conventional family school relations. Not only did students and parents report their desire for a close, collaborative relationship with their high school, respondents indicated that such a relationship was important to student success. In addition, parents saw the family as the necessary bridge between the school and the community.

The views expressed by students and parents were consistent with Harrison's (2006) research on the importance of parents in influencing the attitudes of their children. Harrison (2006) describes the significance of the family as follows:

The family remains a major contributor to all aspects of social and political development. Attitudes of young people are strongly influenced by their parents' attitudes, especially if parents have strong opinion and express them clearly. P. 74

Equally important, Harrison (2006) found that in progressive-prone societies, the family is less likely to act as a closed system. The parents in this study were anxious to connect with the school system and saw the school as a pathway for their children's success. Other researchers have also concluded that the role of parents is critical to the overall academic and social success of students (Eccles & Harold, 1993). Specifically, close family-school relations enable parents to monitor their children's academic and social progress, make more informed decisions about their youth's academic future, and foster positive relationships with teachers.

#### Strengthening the Social Ethic

Student and parent responses described a high school community where all school community stakeholder backgrounds, ideas and opinions were welcomed and supported. Respondents portrayed a rich and varied school-community environment based on mutually shared respect, support and trust. While individuals described a vivid image of school-community solidarity towards academic and social success, interview responses also suggested that each person had the singular power and ability to make the high school environment a great place for all students. A common theme expressed by respondents promoted a social ethic based on personal accountability and commitment to the success of all students. The comments expressed by respondents were consistent with the conclusions drawn by Hargreaves (1994) and Harrison (2006) that a trusting and cooperative social relationship is necessary to a progressive, successful culture. Interview responses described a learning environment where all students can exceed to greatness if our actions (as a school community) are aligned with our individual goals and aspirations. In other words, our actions become a measure of the ethical social framework we hold relative to the academic and social success of students. This approach will allow school community stakeholders to place a greater emphasis on not what individuals think or say but rather on what they actually do.

### Valuing Child Rearing Practices

Results for this investigation showed that students and parents rejected the notion of dependency: the reliance on others for either success or failure. Rather, respondents were quite clear that parents should teach their children to be successful through education and the conscientious application of their individual talents. There was nothing fatalistic or passive in the responses from either students or parents. Student and parent responses also indicated that the school community was fair and just and, therefore, conformity was understood and expected. A common theme expressed by respondents suggested that it was the family's responsibility to encourage determination, academic achievement, high expectations, and self-reliance. The results for this study showed the importance of the family in preparing students for academic and social success. Equally as important, the family was viewed as *staging areas* for children so that they have the necessary foundation and confidence to be successful. Students and parents spoke in reciprocal terms of their responsibility to each other with the goal of being a successful adult.

### Encouraging System-Wide Thinking

A critical question concerning the importance of *culture* centers on whether or not it is fundamental to the academic and social success of students or only one contributing factor. Connor and Lake (1988) described culture as *a hidden, yet unifying theme that provides meaning, direction, and mobilization*. Students and parents portrayed such a theme as a systemic relationship between their cultural beliefs and academic and social success. This dynamic relationship between individual and family beliefs and the school community is what Harrison (2006) suggests leads to critical connections where both the individual and society prosper together. While respondents promoted the belief that individual responsibility and accountability were a necessary requirement for personal accomplishments, students and parents felt that it was the community and society they lived in that gave meaning and purpose to their success. Parents and students saw the importance of systems thinking as related to all aspects of the school community. No one individual or group was capable of creating the required conditions for students to be successful. Rather, it is this collective effort or spirit that gives life and vitality to the individual so that he or she has the internal drive to be successful. Systems thinking involves seeing relationships between the parts to the whole and it is with this lens that respondents created the image of a school community where all school community stakeholders supported all students and students reciprocated by honoring the confidence given to them.

### Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment

Respondents described a high school environment where teachers and students were partners in the educational process. Students and their parents stated that the benefits from this environment were positive learning outcomes, student engagement and inquiry, and a classroom filled with passion, and excitement. An interesting paradox surfaced however, with a closer examination of student and parent comments. The paradox is that the stronger the teacher, the greater opportunity for a learning-centered environment. For example, it is the teacher that is most assured and self-confident that is more likely to allow his or her students the greatest amount of autonomy over their own learning experiences. In

other words, the key to a successful learning environment may not necessarily be connected to curriculum and instruction, instructional alignment, standards, testing and supervision, but with how democratic the classroom is perceived to be by students and parents. This line of thinking is supported by Harrison (2006) who suggests that democratic institutions evolve from basic values, beliefs, and attitudes and cannot just simply be manufactured. The students in this study indicated that they were more likely to learn and be successful when given more freedom – not less – and when they had teachers that authentically communicated high expectations, confidence, hope, and trust.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

*Culture of success* factors and guiding principles developed in this study are important for a number of reasons. First, the data was exclusively generated by students and parents. Unlike other change initiatives, the results for this study were based on what successful African American and Latino students and their parents thought about their schools, classrooms, teachers and school-family relationships. Second, student and parent interview results focused directly on key factors associated with high school change. Respondents provided critical feedback on such issues as school community relations, school innovation, suggestions for professional development and quality, curriculum and instructional matters, educational standards, and accountability. Third, student and parent responses framed an array of factors consistent with Harrison's (2006) work on self-reliant and progressive cultural characteristics.

To create the necessary conditions for student success requires more than a basic understanding of those values and beliefs that support high student achievement. What is also required is a realignment between those cultural factors which promote student success and the overall infrastructure of high schools. Every high school contains a structural subsystem to produce desired outcomes and a social subsystem to coordinate activities in support of those outcomes. From curriculum and instructional matters to how decisions are made, all school community stakeholders will need to be part of this realignment effort. While engaging parents and community members in school reform is not necessarily a new idea, the results from this study suggests adapting AI to high school change can create a new vision for school reform. AI encourages stakeholders to create new mental models and images to overcome the limitations which generally accompany school change efforts based on problem-solving. By focusing on current strengths that exist and possibilities of what could be, school community stakeholders are more likely to find common ground and therefore a stronger desire to promote factors that support a culture of success. Two steps stakeholders might consider in beginning the high school change process could include (1) the creation of a *deficit-free* learning environment and (2) the design of a full system learning environment.

Step One: A deficit-free learning environment increases the likelihood for student academic and social success. The deficit model places problems at the center of the learning process, which may actually limit the ability of teachers to be creative and enterprising in responding to the needs of all students. By shifting the focus from deficits to assets, teachers may be able to pay closer attention to the root causes of student success. Instead of teachers spending most of their time finding and recognizing student deficits or weaknesses, teachers refocus their energy and creativity toward student talents and potential. According to Buckingham and Clifton

(2001) each individual has a set of dominant talents that hold the promise and potential of becoming powerful strengths. A strength is defined as a combination of talents, skills and knowledge that are consistently and successfully applied to achieve a desired result.

As teachers build a deficit-free learning environment from the *inside-out*, they gain the necessary self-confidence and motivation to change the overall high school culture. As enough teachers have success with this new infrastructure, sub-cultures develop promoting affirmative values, beliefs, and assumptions. The key is for teachers to discover, develop, integrate, and enhance student talents into the learning process so as to increase student opportunities for success. As a result, deficits become immaterial and students gain increased confidence as they concentrate on their talents and become less dependent on others for their own learning. When this occurs, learning, itself, becomes a reinforcing agent for student success. Learning returns to its natural state of being a creative process where together teachers and students create a reinforcing loop of success.

Step Two: A full system learning environment embraces the complete integration of parent and community member skills and knowledge around student talents. Consistent with the asset-based model, teachers recruit and organize parents and community members as facilitators, mentors, and purveyors of skills and knowledge to create multiple learning relationships for students. In a full system design, teachers match parent and community member skills and knowledge to student talents. The role of the teacher is to create a learning experience that mirrors the playful originality similar to that of a *jazz band*, in which learning flows freely and is mutually exchanged, inspiring students to new levels of achievement, mastery, and understanding. Learning in a full system design is therefore improvisational where teachers, parents, and community members collaboratively provide the necessary skills and knowledge to make student talents come alive.

To implement a full system learning environment teachers will need to consider various changes that are likely to impact their role and responsibilities in the classroom. Specifically, teachers will become less responsible for direct instruction and more accountable for assuring a multiple range of opportunities exists for students to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge around their identified talents. To do this, schools will need to become more flexible and less rigid while providing teachers greater autonomy to work directly with school community stakeholders. As determined and directed by classroom teachers, parents and community members will play a more precise role in focusing on the skills and knowledge necessary to inspire all students to greatness. Skills and knowledge when presented in this manner are likely to be viewed in a more positive and productive way by students as they continually receive positive feedback from a maximum number of school community stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to uncover the underlying reasons why certain African American and Latino students were so successful in high school and use this information as a foundation for developing school-community initiatives to create a culture of success for all high school students. By focusing directly on the most successful students and their parents it was believed that we could learn more about the factors behind a successful teaching and learning

environment and how those forces could be replicated in other high schools. While there is an ongoing debate regarding the type of changes necessary to improve high schools, cultural factors have generally been neglected by policy makers and practitioners. By investigating the possibility that certain cultural factors promote academic and social success, school community stakeholders may be more likely to leverage certain curriculum and instructional strategies to the betterment of all students.

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Exhibit 1  
Student AI Questions

STUDENT APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONNAIRE  
Creating a Culture of Success

You have been selected to participate in this project because you are a great, successful student. We want to know why you are so successful. We want to know what you consider to be great about your high school, your classrooms, subjects, other students and teachers. Our goal is to use the stories you tell us to make your high school great for all students. We want all students to be successful just like you. Thank you for being here today and helping us to achieve our goal.

**DIRECTIONS:** Pair up with another student. Try to find someone that you do not know. We want you to interview one another. Complete one interview fully before going on to the next. If you need more information or clarification ask follow-up questions. Record the results from your interview on this form. During your interview, please be an active listener.

During your interview we hope you will discover, understand, and tell stories about what is best about your high school and why you are successful as a student. Before you conduct your interview, please take a few minutes to read the questions and decide how you will personally answer each question.

- 1a. What is it about your **high school** that makes it great?
- 1b. What is it about your high school experience that you believe has helped you become a successful student?
- 1c. When you think about your success as a high school student, what three things do you value the most?
- 2a. You are a **successful student**. What does it mean to be a successful student?
- 2b. What do you do that makes you a successful student?
- 2c. Think of another successful student that you admire. Why do you admire this person?
- 2d. What is it about this person that makes him or her successful as a student?

- 3a. What is your favorite **subject**?
- 3b. What is it about this subject that makes it your favorite?
- 3c. What is your most exciting subject?
- 3d. What makes it exciting?
- 4a. If you could invent or create the most exciting and interesting **classroom**, what would it look like?
- 4b. What would make this classroom an exciting place to learn?
- 4c. Without mentioning names, give some examples of how your teachers have made your classroom fun, exciting, and an interesting place.
- 5a. If tomorrow you were told that you no longer had to attend high school, would you continue to attend?
- 5b. What is it that would **motivate** you to continue to attend?
- 5c. Without mentioning names, what is it about your classes and teachers that would motivate you to continue to attend?
- 5d. How is being “connected” to your high school a motivating factor in your success as a student?

Exhibit 2  
Parent/Guardian AI Questions

PARENT/GUARDIAN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONNAIRE  
Creating a Culture of Success

You have been selected to participate in this project because you have a successful student. We want to know why your student is so successful. We want to know what you consider to be great about your student's high school, classrooms, subjects, and teachers. Our goal is to use the stories you tell us to make high schools great for all students. Thank you for being here today and helping us to achieve our goal.

**DIRECTIONS:** Pair up with another parent/guardian. Try to find someone that you do not know. We want you to interview one another. Complete one interview fully before going on to the next. If you need more information or clarification ask follow-up questions. Record the results from your interview on this form. During your interview, please be an active listener.

During your interview we hope you will discover, understand, and tell stories about what is best about your student's high school and why your student is successful. Before you conduct your interview, please take a few minutes to read the questions and decide how you will personally answer each question.

- 1a. What is it about your student's **high school** that makes it great?
  
- 1b. What is it about your student's high school experience that you believe has helped him or her become a successful student?
  
- 1c. When you think about your student's success as a high school student, what three things do you value most about their high school education?
  
- 2a. From your point of view, what does it mean to be a successful student?
  
- 2b. Identify three things that make a **student successful**.
  
- 2c. What do you do, as a parent/guardian, to encourage your student to be successful?
  
- 3a. What is your student's favorite **subject**?

- 3b. What is it about this subject that makes it their favorite?
- 3c. What is your student's most exciting **subject**?
- 3d. What makes it exciting?
- 4a. If you could invent or create the most exciting and interesting **classroom** for your student, what would it look like?
- 4b. What would make this classroom an exciting place to learn?
- 4c. Without mentioning names, give some examples of what teachers do to make your student's classroom fun, exciting, and an interesting place.
- 5a. If tomorrow you were told your student no longer had to attend high school, why do you think he or she would continue to attend?
- 5b. Without mentioning names, what is it about his or her classes and teachers that would motivate your student to continue to attend?
- 5c. How is being "connected" to a high school a motivating factor in your student's success as a student?

Exhibit 3  
Follow-up Student Questions

- 1) What are some of the school and classroom rules, regulations, procedures that encourage student success?
- 2) During the interviews many students expressed appreciation for teachers who care. Tell us what qualities a caring teacher possesses.
- 3) What values, beliefs, and attitudes do you hold that encourage you to succeed?
- 4) Tell us about your goals----what does the future hold for you?
- 5) What do your parent(s) do to make you feel successful?
- 6) Tell us about a positive interaction you have had with a teacher.
- 7) Describe the skills that make you a successful student.
- 8) Tell us about a time you knew you were successful. How did you know? Describe the situation and what made it a positive experience for you.

Exhibit 4  
Follow-up Parent Questions

- 1) During the interviews many parents expressed appreciation for teachers who care about their children. Tell us what qualities a caring teacher possesses?
- 2) What are the values, beliefs, and attitudes that help make your child a great student?
- 3) Tell us about what is great about your family that has led to the success of your child. What have you done as a parent to have a child who is a self-motivated successful student? Describe what you do to help your child be independent and self-directed?
- 4) Tell us about a positive interaction you have had with a teacher.
- 5) What does the future hold for your child?
- 6) Describe the skills that make you a successful parent.
- 7) Tell us about a time when you knew you were being a successful parent. How did you know? Describe the situation. What made it a great experience? How did it impact your child?

Exhibit 5  
Student Interview Responses: Content Analysis

**(1) Focusing on the Future**

- There are no limits
- Positive outlook for the future
- Striving toward goals
- Over achieving
- School is future oriented
- Teachers create the images, pictures and vision of what is possible for students
- My dream is to have a good education and a better future
- I create the future myself
- The future is unpredictable
- Education helps me to be more successful in life
- I have goals to work toward
- Imagination needs to be stressed to have a future to imagine
- I am able to make plans for the future
- My education will help me to complete my goals for the future
- I want a bright future
- I have lots of opportunities
- I know what I need to be successful in the future
- Teachers care about our future
- Teachers show me everyday that they care about our future
- Classes that have a future focus
- I never procrastinate
- I want more out of life
- Goals are critical
- I set future goals in my life
- I have multiple goals
- My focus is on progress
- I know where I am going in life
- I aspire to have a good career
- School provides the opportunity for me to discover my future
- Counselors open doors to the future
- High school is an investment in my life
- Always looking at the bright side
- I am always optimistic
- I know what I want and I go after it
- Education makes my dreams possible
- I have my future planned: careers, college, and grad school?
- I want a better life
- Positive view of the future
- My future is better than my life now
- My vision is a future that is very positive
- Positive view of the future
- I am open to trying new things

## **(2) Strengthening the Work Ethic**

- Determination is essential to success
- I try to figure things out myself
- I am self-motivated
- Try harder than most
- I am responsible for my own work
- I am self-driven
- I know how to cope with different environments, people, etc.
- I work very hard
- Responsibility and dedication are very important to school success
- We are recognized by the school for our success
- Leadership skills are very important to me
- I admire people who are smart
- I help others to be successful
- I am empowered
- I am admired for my school success
- I am looked up to by my peers
- I want to stand out - be a positive role model
- I don't let problems get in the way
- My success is earned
- No procrastination
- I don't depend on anyone
- I won't be taken for granted
- I push myself
- I go beyond what is expected
- I prioritize what I need to do
- I am an independent thinker
- I set standards high
- I am responsible for my own actions
- I am a good listener
- I am committed
- I try my best at everything
- I am always on task
- I follow through
- I take advantage of opportunities
- I have a strong sense of accomplishments
- I believe in myself
- I practice time management
- I am able to adjust and manage my studies
- It's in my heart
- Doing more than what is expected of me
- I have a strong desire to learn
- I fight for what I want
- School has made me a hard worker
- Resiliency, I don't give up

**(2) Strengthening the Work Ethic (Con't)**

- I challenge myself all of the time
- Loyalty is very important
- I am involved in many school activities
- Reciprocity between my efforts/hard work and success
- I have a powerful drive to do well
- Doing everything when you are supposed to
- Do what is expected
- Being determined
- I am well organized
- I always pay attention
- I give what I have to offer
- I make sure everything is finished
- I invest in myself
- I am reliable
- Balance is important to what I do
- I don't blame others
- You have to work for the things you want
- Do well on everything – not just school
- I have a capacity to overcome obstacles
- Perseverance
- Self-confidence
- I want to make a difference
- Competitive nature
- To be productive
- Self-controlled
- Good attendance
- Open-minded
- Responsible for my own actions
- Positive attitude
- Ask for help if needed
- Non-conformists
- Associate with people that want to succeed
- Student role models
- Hard worker
- Highly competitive
- Overwhelming positive attitude

### **(3) Expanding Family-School Relations**

- School feels like a family
- Making my parents proud of my school accomplishments
- Emotional support from my parents
- The connection between student and family success: student success equals family success
- My family is critical to my high school success
- Doing better than my family
- My mother is my role model
- My family drives me
- To take care of my family
- To overcome community obstacles

### **(4) Strengthening the Social Ethic**

- Stressing decisions and consequences and not just showing up
- Peer pressure is not that important
- Acting as a leader and role model for my peers
- My teachers set standards
- Teachers are and should be the role of authority
- School rules and regulations are administered fairly
- Feeling safe in and around school
- The church in my community is supportive
- Counselors help navigate post high school activities
- School administration is all around and very caring
- We have a community within the classroom
- I try not to disappoint others
- Admiring and supporting other students who have overcome obstacles
- A learning environment driven by the emotion of love
- Students accomplishing goals for themselves not others
- Selflessness
- I want to set a good example for my peers
- A sense of belonging
- Everyone is treated fairly and honestly
- Making friends from different backgrounds
- Every student is a leader
- I am a leader, not a follower
- People noticing when you aren't here
- Diversity: Every culture and person has something to offer and enrich the learning experience
- My teachers share their personal stories
- A social culture of success
- Helping relationships
- Being free to express myself
- I am motivated by my friends
- Different ideas, cultures, religions are all welcomed
- Being a good example for others
- My teachers treat me with respect

**(4) Strengthening the Social Ethic (Con't)**

- Nothing is given to you
- You must earn success
- My teachers are my friends
- Everyone is respectful
- Independent thinking
- Freedom to excel
- Finding my own and proper place
- I have good social skills
- Opportunities and possibilities to do great things
- Diversity of ideas and people
- Hard work is recognized
- Well rounded and open minded
- The energy created by doing well in school
- Having free expression
- Helping other students and being helped
- Act as a role model for other students
- Make a difference in the lives of other students
- My peers view me as a positive example
- I introduce myself to teachers and get to know them

**(5) Valuing Child Rearing Practices**

- I am a good example for my family, my brothers and sisters
- To show my parents that their support and efforts have not been in vain
- Mom works at the school and is very involved
- Mom pushes me
- I want to prove to my parents I can make it in life
- My parents always read to me
- My parents tell me that freedom must be earned
- My family tells me that overcoming obstacles strengthens us
- Parent approval is very important to me
- My parents are my motivation
- My family has instilled success in me
- I have extended family support
- I like my family involved in my school work
- Parents live their dreams vicariously through their children
- I want to do better in life than my parents
- Positive attitude about life came from my parents
- I have a strong desire to help my family
- My parents help me with my homework
- My mother encourages me to ask for help when I need it
- My parents set high expectations
- My parents provide rewards and punishments
- My parents pay attention to what I am doing all of the time
- Both of my parents treat me like a person
- My parents make sure I have the necessary resources to support my education

**(6) Encouraging System-Wide Thinking**

- Active learning environment
- Supportive friends, parents & teachers
- Part of something bigger than I am
- Self-organizing process
- High school is a link between learning and life
- I am not alone
- Respect is the bond which strengthens the connections
- We have a student community
- Mutual motivation between teachers and students
- Diverse teaching styles
- People respect each other
- Teachers pay attention to me
- Learning in one subject is connected to the other
- Students and teachers connect on multiple levels
- Students are responsible to themselves and others
- Working in groups
- Interpersonal trust among students-teachers-parents
- Students all connected in a positive way
- Diversity throughout the system
- Competition is very important
- Everybody helps each other
- Open ended conversations with teachers
- Surround myself with those who are successful
- One-on-one helping relationships
- Friendship is the center of our high schools
- Feeling connected is the key
- School is like a family
- I am a part of something
- Socializing with other successful students
- Student support groups and relationships
- Comfort and support of friends
- Look for the connections between school and the community
- Safety is woven throughout the school
- Interactions everywhere
- Teachers as models
- Competition among my peers
- Connections between high school and college
- School – community reciprocity

### **(7) Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment**

- We have an active classroom
- Positive learning environment
- Teachers respecting students
- Teacher don't give up on students
- Learning is made very accessible
- Teachers value me
- My teachers are approachable
- My teachers understand me as a person
- My teachers constantly encourage me to communicate
- Teachers view students as individuals/persons
- My teachers recognize and encourage the potential in students
- Teachers disclose personal information
- Teachers are a friend
- Teachers engage personally with me
- Teachers talk about their own personal experiences to explain situations
- Teachers pay attention to what I am saying
- My teachers make me believe that I have potential
- Teachers give us the opportunity to be creative
- My school is a place of possibilities
- I am inspired to be creative
- We are always focusing on outcomes
- I am encouraged to stand out from the crowd
- Teachers create a positive climate
- Teachers teach at a pace where everyone can learn
- We have a very peaceful, safe classroom atmosphere
- Teachers search for what interest students
- Teachers create a learning environment that has a minimal amount of distractions
- Teachers have confidence in students
- Drama in teaching
- Hands-on classroom
- Community service helps us learn
- Questions are always answered
- Teachers are spending their own resources
- Teachers help students when they are troubled
- Teachers take care of their students as if they were their own
- Teachers expect students to be successful
- Teachers deviate from the norm
- My school is a community
- My work is hard and challenging
- Students act as teacher assistants
- Teacher and student interaction
- My talents are central to my teachers

**(7) Moving to a Learning–Centered Environment (Con’t)**

- We have a colorful classroom
- Subjects are connected
- There is a positive bond between teachers and students
- Someone is always there to help me
- Students become teachers
- Teachers want to make sure I am learning
- Teachers have courage to teach outside the norm
- Teachers continually focus on the positive
- I am always able to express myself
- Hands-on work is great
- Student interaction
- New experiences all the time
- Living up to high expectations
- Engagement
- Learn about life
- Many different stimuli
- Teachers push you to do your best
- Competing with others
- One-on-one helping relationships
- Allowing for creativity
- Real life is mixed in with the curriculum
- Each day is different from the next
- Surprises all the time
- Learning is personal – relates to my life
- Teaching becomes very personal
- Hands-on projects
- A colorful school
- Beauty in our school
- Knowing and understanding the relationship between high school and college really helps me
- Teachers care about my life
- A comfortable, safe, and relaxing environment
- Lots of color in our school
- Positive learning environment is everywhere
- I feel like I am doing a good job
- There are many choices
- My teachers connect me to my school
- All teachers support all students
- Teachers require students to be responsible
- Teachers make sure students learn

Exhibit 6  
Parent Interview Responses: Content Analysis

**(1) Focusing on the Future**

- Internally established goals
- Short and long term goals
- Goal driven learning system
- A positive attitude will take you far in life
- The door of success is open to all who want it
- Life is what you make it; a good education makes it better
- I tell my children to choose the life they want
- Future economic security is very important to them
- I provide my children with a picture of the future
- My students have a sense of direction
- My child can do anything she wants to do
- I expect my child to be successful
- I am very hopeful
- We are dedicated to the future
- Focus is always on the future
- Good things in life will happen to my children
- We all value the future
- Our focus is on life
- I keep talking about the future to my children
- The future is always on our mind
- Schools are a pathway to the future

**(2) Strengthening the Work Ethic**

- My son is internally driven to succeed
- My daughter has a desire to learn at a higher level
- Determination is the key
- We have a positive attitude about school
- My children have a will to learn
- They apply themselves
- Consistency is the focus in our family
- Honor is very important
- To be a leader is what I emphasize
- We are all open to different ideas
- Our ideals as a family are important to my son
- Positive school leadership
- Overcoming obstacles is very important
- To be better than others
- Teachers encourage with positive words
- Believing in yourself
- Drive for success
- Confidence in herself

**(2) Strengthening the Work Ethic (Con't)**

- Dedication to be successful
- Will to be successful is in my daughter
- Participates in class all the time
- Commitment to school
- We tell our children to complete what they start
- Our son loves competition
- We encourage discipline
- Study habits are taught in school
- Perseverance is essential
- Commitment to education is taught in our family
- High expectations
- Our son is adaptive
- Pay attention in school all the time
- High school teaches strong leadership skills
- Student is responsible for their own success
- High personal expectations
- Tenacity is essential
- Self sufficient and she has the will to be successful
- Drive to be the best
- Express self openly and freely
- Eager to learn
- Good study habits
- Self discipline is very important
- The courage to overcome every obstacle

**(3) Expanding Family-School Relations**

- Communicate and discuss issues with my children about high school
- Family connected to high school
- Providing educational materials from home
- Education is a joint effort between the home and school
- Parents have a voice in our high school
- My son likes his parents around his high school
- We are involved and aware of what's taking place in school
- Being insistent is very important as a parent
- Paying attention to what my daughter is doing all of the time
- Leading by example as a parent
- Having a sense of humor is very important with high school kids
- My student is a priority in my life
- Instilling the value of education in my son is essential
- Always encouraging my children is my responsibility
- Support system at home for my children is very important
- Money as a reward system for student grades
- Parents and family welcomed in school
- Joint venture between school and family to insure student success

### **(3) Expanding Family-School Relations (Con't)**

- Being a role model for students
- Communicate with teachers all of the time
- Home as a foundation for my daughter
- My students understand that I want the best for them
- Influence of family is very important to school success
- Learning begins at home and is reinforced at school
- Parents are a student's first teacher
- Generosity of school toward me as parent
- Parent participation in school events is necessary
- Extended family support for my son
- Our high school makes the classroom like home
- Two-way communications between school and home
- Showing up at school is a major first step
- Parents know the subjects that their students are taking
- Parents know the challenges their students face
- Parental guidance integrated with educational process
- A welcoming climate at the high school is appreciated
- The administration makes me feel welcomed
- Our children believe that they are able to overcome obstacles through ingenuity
- We teach our daughter that everything is possible
- She is open minded and willing to learn
- My daughter is an independent thinker
- Our school allows for creativity
- My son has always been encouraged to make his own decisions

### **(4) Strengthening the Social Ethic**

- My son tries to avoid peer pressure
- Our family is open to all ideas
- Classrooms are comfortable and inviting
- Education symbolizes freedom and a better life
- Respect, discipline, and success are highly valued
- Positive role models are essential for successful students (Parent, teachers, classmates, other adults)
- You must believe in and support your students, every way possible
- Success of one student leads to success of other students
- My daughter does not give into peer pressure
- Being a part of school is an honor
- Spiritual commitment in support of my efforts to be successful
- To be successful you need the help and support of others
- Mutual respect among teachers, students, and parents
- Positive attitude about the school experience is always encouraged
- All teachers are concerned about each student
- Success equals opportunity plus competitive edge
- Value the information provided by everyone
- Recognition for each student is always important

**(4) Strengthening the Social Ethic (Con't)**

- Positive feedback is everywhere
- Praise for student success
- Students are validated
- Reward systems are in place
- A support system for all students
- Everyone knows and appreciates each other
- Each student treated as an individual
- Schools are personal
- My children look for the good in everyone
- Empowerment everywhere
- Golden rule should always be followed
- Freedom of expression increases commitment
- Students play a role in the design of their school and classroom
- Educators are role models
- Schools promote being a value to society
- My son is always able to express his feelings freely
- Don't be afraid of asking for help

**(5) Valuing Child Rearing Practices**

- Constant support for my children
- Being involved in your student's life is important
- Success feels good for students and makes parents proud
- I support my daughter's decisions
- Parents interact and ask questions with their children about school
- Parents continually monitoring student progress
- Parenting classes are very beneficial
- Being a strong role model
- Ask everyday about school
- Eat dinner together with my children and communicate about school
- We celebrate success
- We accept responsibility in my family
- Kisses and hugs
- Children respect others and their property
- Other people compliment my children
- My children have been taught to treat others well
- Have a very positive attitude
- Dinner as a family
- Honesty and following through
- Always encouraging
- Not accepting excuses for failure
- Kids should be busy
- This is a land of opportunity
- Solid home foundation
- High expectations
- Healthy home

**(5) Valuing Child Rearing Practices (Con't)**

- Don't judge
- Unconditional love for son
- I am always proud of my children
- Consistent positive parent support
- Dedication to my children

**(6) Encouraging System-Wide Thinking**

- All four grade levels are connected
- On-going interaction in high school
- Positive friends are encouraged
- The most important relationship is the teacher-student relationship
- Encourage the spirit of knowledge
- Interactions with other people
- Reciprocal support between high school teachers and students
- Sense of community is everywhere
- Mutual respect is everywhere
- The totality of all connections creates a sense of beauty and a sense of pride for the student
- When everything is connected things make sense for the student
- Belonging to something
- Our schools are safe and secure
- Team work makes things possible
- Respect for others
- Connect school to college

**(7) Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment**

- Easy access to schools
- Success breeds success and support
- Basic skills application to real life
- Teachers present images of what success looks like
- Safe environment exists in our schools
- Teachers encourage college
- Praise for students going beyond expectations
- Rigorous curriculum
- Easy to talk with teachers
- Teachers enforce the rules
- Communicate regularly about my son's performance
- Teachers are available to help students
- Allow kids freedom of expression
- Caring teachers communicate with parents in a variety of ways
- Teachers have a personal relationship with my son beyond the classroom
- Affirmative learning environment
- Learning beyond grades
- Constant new information
- Simulations in the classroom

**(7) Moving to a Learning-Centered Environment (Con't)**

- Flexibility exists in our high school
- Challenging course offerings
- Positive feedback exists everywhere
- Positive climate is very important
- Many choices in our high school
- Interactive learning experiences
- Story telling by teachers is very helpful
- Teachers are available everywhere
- Teachers are connecting with students by sharing their experiences
- Teachers with a sense of humor have a better relationship with students
- Students engaged in learning
- Connected to real life
- Well rounded education
- Our high school is designed to build confidence in students
- Our high school is designed to achieve goals
- Learning is engaging and exciting
- Curriculum diversity is in our classrooms
- Focus is on life experience
- Continuity of teachers and counselors working with students
- Parental guidance integrated with educational process
- Learning in the round is very productive
- Service learning is essential
- Schools are connected to the community
- Teachers provide competitive environment
- Learning as a system wide process
- Relevant learning experiences
- Hands on learning is enjoyed by my daughter
- Connections everywhere in high school
- Continuous improvement is our high school's goal
- Our teachers meet student needs on a regular basis
- Understanding student development
- Nurturing teachers
- Small school feeling
- Open door policy of teachers
- Lots of conversations between teachers and students

Contact Information

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