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United for Wellbeing: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Increase Social Cohesion and Student Wellbeing in an Ethnically Diverse Rural School District

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Disciplines

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United for Wellbeing: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Increase Social Cohesion and Student Wellbeing in an Ethnically Diverse Rural School District

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Advisor: Gabe Paoletti

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Across the United States many rural communities rely on migrant populations for agricultural labor. Migrant families bring with them children who must be educated and made to feel part of a larger school community. Increasingly rural communities and the school districts that comprise them struggle to ensure that all students have equal opportunities for educational success and improved subjective wellbeing. Educators have expressed concern that communities themselves are dealing with increasingly divided populations wherein majority and minority populations do not appear to interact effectively or work collaboratively. This paper will look at the struggles of migrant families, the theory behind social constructivism, social cohesion, and group efficacy, and the importance of student wellbeing. This will be done through the lens of positive psychology as bedrock on which to build a more cohesive community. An Appreciative Inquiry perspective will be taken to determine methods for increasing social cohesion in order to improve the wellbeing of the region of Southern Chester County, PA. The final product will be a proposal letter initiating the development of a possible 2-3 day Appreciative Inquiry summit, combined with proposed educator-only trainings, to be implemented as a kick-off to the creation of a united Southern Chester County.

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Introduction

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" Emma Lazarus, 1883.

The Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., contends that this iconic quote from the poem, “The Great Colossus” wasn’t originally written with the intention of becoming a beacon for worldwide immigration to the United States, but rather as a fund-raiser for building the statue’s pedestal (Statue of Liberty-Ellis Foundation, 2016). Nonetheless, it has become one of the great anchoring points for those seeking freedom and a better life. Recent statistics from the American Psychological Association note that 75% of all U.S. farm workers are immigrants, while 1/3 of the overall immigrant population in the U.S. is from Mexico. By 2020 it is estimated that 1 out of 3 children in the United States will be born from immigrant parents (American Psychological Association, 2012). While immigration continues to be a hot button political and economic issue in this country, the fact remains that these children and their families are residing within the borders of the U.S. and are currently being underserved by our public institutions. Many public schools serve a large migrant population without the proper supports for their students, their teachers, and their communities. This is particularly true in the Southern Chester County portion of Pennsylvania where school districts are struggling to properly instruct individual migrant students, while also fostering a shared sense of community cohesion across diverse ethnic groups. Positive psychology can provide migrant students, their families, and their communities a synergistic learning environment with a forward-looking construct. Using the tenets of positive psychology this paper proposes that the development of regional social

cohesion across the ethnic divides of Southern Chester County (SCC), PA will aim to increase the subjective wellbeing of students and consequently community members. The paper will further argue that social cohesion will lead to implementation of a whole community approach to benefit the education of each child. This whole community approach will be furthered through educator training on ways to improve student wellbeing. The methodology proposed for improving social cohesion will be through the development and implementation of a regional Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Summit, a practice whose roots are intertwined with positive psychology. Utilization of AI will require background research into the migrant student experience, the practices of social constructivism and social cohesion, the stages of group development and interaction, and finally the importance of student wellbeing to community success. The mission is a united Southern Chester County that synthesizes the strengths of the diverse community from toddlers to retirees, and from business owners to religious institutions. The product will be a collaborative, coherent and engaged regional community where the focus shines on the success and wellbeing of Southern Chester County's students, families, and community members.

Southern Chester County Demographics and the Migrant Experience

Charles Vickery (2013) in a report for The United Way of Southern Chester County writes that this region of Pennsylvania comprises 256 square miles and houses approximately 109,000 residents. There are four southernmost school districts that make up SCC, Avon Grove School District (AGSD), Oxford Area School District (OASD), Kennett Square Consolidated School District (KSCSD), and Unionville-Chadds Ford School District (UCFSD) (Vickery, 2013). SCC is a regional subsection of the larger Pennsylvania County of Chester that has the highest per capita income of the entire state of Pennsylvania and counts in the top 1% of national

per capita income (Vickery, 2013). Despite the vast wealth at the overall county level, at the regional level of SCC there are vastly disparate income levels existing within each individual school community, and even across the four comprising districts (Public School Review, 2016; Vickery, 2013).

The four small towns of SCC contain a concentrated amount of businesses devoted to mushroom farming. Kennett Square is known as “The Mushroom Capital” of the world, and dedicates an entire weekend every fall to a Mushroom Festival. This agricultural industry brings a great deal of money into the area and requires a labor force willing to engage in difficult tasks. Workers in the mushroom farms are primarily young men and women from Mexico, Guatemala, and other Central American locations. The percentage of the population of SCC that was of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity was 14.4 percent in 2013 with Spanish being the primary home language for 12 percent of residents (Vickery, 2013). In the time period from 1990-2013 the area Hispanic population increased 325.3%, compared with just 45.6% among non-Hispanics (Vickery, 2013). Having such a large population of Hispanic workers in the area puts a heavy demand on the local school districts to educate the children of these families. Kennett Square Consolidated School District currently has an enrolled Hispanic population of 41%, (Public School Review, 2016) as compared to the state average of 3% (Public School Review, 2016). Avon Grove School District, and Oxford Area School Districts respectively educate 20% and 23% Hispanic populations (Public School Review, 2016). It should be noted that the Unionville-Chadds Ford District currently has only 4% Hispanic student enrollment (Public School Review, 2016). Kennett High School and Unionville High School are separated by a seven-minute drive of 3.2 miles, however the difference in community make-up and lifestyle is vast.

While Chester County itself is counted as one of the wealthiest in the country, in the smaller region of Southern Chester County childhood poverty rates have been on the increase with the largest upticks being seen in the wealthiest district of Unionville-Chadds Ford. UCFSD has seen a 231.6% increase in students eligible for free and reduced price lunches from 2007-2013 (Vickery, 2013). The National School Lunch and National School Breakfast Programs are the country's method of determining childhood poverty based on a formula related to total family members versus total family income (Vickery, 2013). In 2013 there were 4,643 SCC students eligible for free and reduced price lunches (Vickery, 2013). Each summer when school ends local food banks are overwhelmed by the number of families seeking assistance to feed their children who were getting both breakfast and lunch at school. Low-cost meals are provided to nearly 6,000 kids daily during the school year. With just \$5.00 a day in food cost allotments there is a three million dollar shortfall in food assistance for the impoverished population of Southern Chester County (Vickery, 2013).

In addition to socioeconomic factors, personal discussions with teachers, administrators, and parents in the SCC school systems, reveal that the language barrier is a concern across the area as more and more white residents are unable to speak Spanish, and more and more Hispanic residents are unable to speak English (personal communication, 2016). Coaches of local youth sports leagues report that their athletes are predominantly white children; for example 4 out of the 97 players on the Avon Grove High School football team roster are Hispanic, .04% (personal communication, 2016). The extra-curricular event roster for Reading Olympics, held at Avon Grove Intermediate School, shows that out of 100 participants, none were of Hispanic ethnicity (personal communication, 2016). Personal observation as a parent and teacher in SCC leads this author to posit that Hispanic youth, while given access to the same opportunities as the rest of

their school peers, do not historically take advantage. One can assume that this divide leads to essentially segregated populations within the same school district as well as the same community.

In effect, throughout Southern Chester County, there are two distinct cultural groups existing, who hardly ever interact with each other. With experience as a teacher at the intermediate level, and as a parent of students at the secondary level the author has observed that as early as middle school, students tend to separate into two groups and it is very rare to find both ethnic groups interacting with each other outside of the elementary school classroom. The Pennsylvania Department of Education website statistics illustrate that for 2014-2015, across Pennsylvania, Hispanic students have the highest drop out rate from area high schools at 3.06% compared to 0.94% for Caucasian students (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016) while Telles and Ortiz (2008) report these students suffer from the lowest education levels and highest dropout rates of any ethnic group in the country (Telles & Ortiz, 2008 p. 106-112). In personal interviews with numerous high school guidance counselors and teachers in the rural area of SCC they contend that even for those graduating students the lack of computer access and funds for application fees make it difficult for Hispanic families to help their children navigate the complexities of college and the workforce (personal communication, 2016).

To successfully unite the people of SCC we need to understand the barriers that are sometimes faced by a minority ethnic group and identify the benefits of a unified community. The agricultural nature of mushroom farming lends itself to an influx of immigrants seeking to make a better life in a more stable labor market than can be found in their native county. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2014) migration tends to be a “network-driven process” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014 p. 83) wherein new arrivals to a geographic area are naturally guided

by family members already residing there. These prior arrivals have had a chance to establish that jobs, neighborhoods, and resources are conducive enough to encourage extended family and friends to follow (Portes & Rumbaut, 2104 p. 83). While this region funneling can be helpful for assimilation to a new culture and allows for ties to ethnic social groups, it can have an adverse impact on the economic advancement of the immigrant group as a whole. Studies by Barry Chiswick and Paul Miller (2002) have shown that living in clumped areas of ethnic homogeneity can lead to decreased overall job opportunities, as well as lower wage earning ability (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). In areas where there is a small cluster of language homogeneity housed within a larger English-speaking majority, the cost of material goods such as social networks, products, and services, is higher which in turn leads to a negative effect on wages (Chiswick & Miller, 2002). The reverse can be seen in large areas of language homogeneity such as inner cities (Chiswick & Miller, 2002), this would support the need for clusters of diverse ethnic groups to work together with the majority population to promote group cohesion and community-wide success in an effort to advance family earnings. Immigrant populations from Mexico have been found to have a 30% earnings disadvantage when compared to European immigrant groups (Chiswick & Miller, 2002) furthering the need for closing the diversity gap within SCC. In areas where the population of an ethnic minority is smaller and more transient, such as rural regions, migrant workers meet with increased discrimination and public perception that certain jobs would be more “appropriate” for their ethnic group (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 155-157). Existing stereotypes, pre-established beliefs, and the weak educational and economic leverage of the ethnic minority are believed to factor into the behaviors of both the majority and minority populations (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 155-157). As noted earlier via the experiences and

anecdotal reports of the educators, students, parents, and community members of Southern Chester County, it would appear that this research is corroborated.

These effects look to be continued over time. Longitudinal research completed by Telles and Ortiz in 2008 found that for each subsequent generation of migrant families established after the first generation arrivals there is a “linear and downward pattern of assimilation” (Telles and Ortiz, 2008 p. 283-285). The longer a migrant family stays in a rural region, the less likely subsequent generations are to achieve education and economic success. The majority of other immigrant populations (Asian, Middle Eastern) will see an increase in their socioeconomic status the longer they reside in the U.S., however for Hispanic families this does not occur (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 155-157). A persistent assimilation downward, particularly in working class/labor groups struggling to mesh with the ethnic majority, leads to class stagnation or even degeneration (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014 p. 279-28). Researchers theorize that this negative effect is the result of the growing tendency for American society to be divided along class, rather than race, lines (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

These negative effects apply not only to economics but to family relations and education as well. Portes and Rumbaut (2014), discuss what they term “selective dissonant acculturation” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 282) to illustrate that subsequent generations of migrant families learn the native language of their host country and forget the language and culture of their grandparents (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 282). By the third generation a migrant family’s ethnic heritage and language of origin cease to play any viable role (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 235-238). The personal experience of the author with several generations of migrant families in Southern Chester County bears this out. Students attending conferences with their parents or grandparents have shared their inability to communicate with their older family members – the

students are speaking predominantly English and the parents predominantly Spanish. The author has seen first hand how this inability to communicate in the home leads to increased frustration over academic and behavioral expectations.

Understanding the experience of migrant families affords us the opportunity to develop methods for eliminating this “racialization” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 294-295) in an effort to combat what becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of decreased socioeconomic status. Telles & Ortiz (2008) posit that racialization is a sociological process that “naturalizes social distinctions and creates stereotypes that guide individuals in how they interact with or value others.... in effect making racial differences meaningful” (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 36). The signals given off by the surrounding community not only effect economics but also the way in which young people feel about and engage with their schools and communities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 295). One aim of a school community should be to help second and third generation migrant children assimilate in such a way that language and culture are not lost, ensuring continued opportunities for parental guidance (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 282).

According to research completed by Putnam, Feldstein and Cohen (2003), working as a unified community to ensure the success of all children benefits society by increasing social capital, which they define as the ability to build interconnected, reciprocal networks marked by a feeling of trust and mutuality (Putnam, Feldstein & Cohen, 2003, p.2). The more a neighborhood works to ensure that everyone knows each other’s names, as well as the names of the children the less likely that neighborhood is to fall victim to acts of criminal behavior (Putnam, 2000, p 310-311). In fact this goes beyond just knowing the names of neighbors, Algan, Beasley, Vitaro, and Tremblay (2013) report that increasing the sociability of adults and children has shown that kids do better academically, and the communal economy improves overall (as cited in Putnam, 2015,

p. 115). The bonds of community and the resources provided by social connections have an extensive effect on multiple aspects, such as health, public safety, and child welfare (Putnam, 2015, p. 207) While most majority population Americans, particularly middle class, have a more rosy picture of the neighborhood connections at all class levels, lower class Americans tend to be more “socially isolated” from neighbors with most connections occurring with family members (Putnam, 2015, p. 207).

Not taking the time to invest in building stronger communities leads to what Goldin and Katz (2008) term the “decreased utilization of the less educated” (as cited in Putnam, 2015 p. 231) as the skill sets of the ethnic minority populations fail to keep pace with the technological focus of employers (as cited in Putnam, 2015 p. 231). As this phenomenon spreads the general tendency has been for society to place the blame on the education system, rather than taking a larger look at the socioeconomic imbalance (Putnam, 2015, p. 231). Studies show that the socioeconomic gap is more a function of a child’s life outside of the school system, as opposed to what occurs inside the school’s walls (Putnam, 2015, p. 182). One way to combat this is to build a reciprocal community that supports the school environment. The Coalition for Community Schools (2016) states that “integrated” schools and communities focusing on “academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities” (Coalition for Community Schools, 2016). Cultivating an understanding of social cohesion through the process of Appreciative Inquiry can deepen this desire for a unified school and community, while at the same time perpetuating an understanding that a rising social tide of wellbeing raises all boats.

The argument of this paper is that Southern Chester County would benefit from the creation of connections between all community aspects, as well as increased dialogue between all stakeholders in each town/school district. In addition those who are working on the front lines with the children of SCC, our educators, would profit from an understanding of the theories and background outlined within. The challenge is to bring groups together in a true environment of inclusiveness, collaboration and shared ideals for the future success of the students and families of Southern Chester County. The author's position is that the positive, forward-focused orientation of Appreciative Inquiry would serve as a useful tool to generate change.

Social Cohesion's Roots in Social Constructivism

A search of the University of Pennsylvania database returns over 400,000 titles of articles containing the term social cohesion. The concept has been studied for decades by sociologists, psychologists, and social scientists, dating back to pioneering research by John Thibaut and Leon Festinger in the mid 1950s (Festinger, 1950; Thibaut, 1950;). Researchers of social cohesion can trace the roots of their study even further back to the social constructivist perspective. Social constructivism focuses on explaining the processes by which human beings make sense of who they are within the larger social domain (Gergen, 1985) and is founded in the belief that constructing knowledge is a continuous process of social and individual interactions (Palinscar, 1998).

Social constructivism and consequently social cohesion, owe their existence to the studies of Lev Vygotsky in the 1920's and 1930's. Vygotsky (1930) espoused that all human activity occurs within social and cultural contexts and therefore any research or study of human development or interactions should also occur within those contexts (as cited in Palinscar, 1998). Social constructivists believe that in order for human beings to function together they must have

agreed- upon common systems of understanding, with language being one example (Gergen, 1985). These systems of interaction are integral to effective social engagement (Gergen, 1985).

Regardless of cultural background all human beings have a common understanding of the basic emotions of anger, sadness, disgust, and fear, although they may have varying methods for displaying and reacting to those emotions (Gergen, 2010). These cultural differences in displaying emotional understandings illustrate the need to engage more deeply in cultural activities in order to ensure group understanding and success (Palinscar, 1998). Research has shown that by drawing upon collective knowledge and varying cultural backgrounds groups are able to show more success than lone pockets of individuals attempting to affect change (Palinscar, 1998).

A difficulty when applying the tenets of social constructivism is helping group members to internalize a co-construction of meaning in an effort to build common foundations (Palinscar, 1998). Crook (1994) and Rommetveit (1974) termed this fabrication of communal understanding as “intersubjective attitude” (as cited in Palinscar, 1998) and can be quite challenging to achieve when working with groups that contain members of Western societies that tend to be more individualist in nature (Palinscar, 1998).

Robert Putnam (2007) is one researcher who believes that the social constructivist theory of community wide cohesion is not necessarily beneficial and in fact can lead to higher levels of distrust within and across community subgroups (Putnam, 2007). He calls this phenomenon constrict theory and reports that people living in more diverse ethnic neighborhoods feel less desire to interact with the outgroup population as well as with members of their own homogenous population (Putnam, 2007). His theory proposes that people disengage from other

members of their community due to increased levels of distrust and feelings of threat – in effect humans begin to “hunker down” like turtles pulling into their shell (Putnam, 2007).

Similar research completed more recently by Miles Hewstone points to the exact opposite findings of the pessimistic view of Putnam (Hewstone, 2015). Hewstone (2105) posited that instead of hunkering down humans will engage in “intergroup contact theory” wherein positive contact with outgroup members leads to increased feelings of positivity toward both ingroup and outgroup members (Hewstone, 2015). He cites the research of Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) in which data revealed that quality contact between diverse members of the group serves as a moderator to issues of distrust and minimizes disengagement (as cited in Hewstone, 2015). There is growing evidence that positive outgroup contact carries secondary transfer effects meaning that feelings of trust transfer from one outgroup to another outgroup despite having no immediate contact with the second group (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008, as cited in Hewstone, 2015).

Hewstone’s research was completed primarily in neighborhoods and he acknowledges that further study is necessary in schools and other community organizations (Hewstone, 2015) yet his preliminary findings would appear to dispute the earlier hypothesis of Putnam. Ultimately Hewstone urges that an integrated community of citizens should be an aspiration, as opposed to just groups of people living together, but apart (Hewstone, 2015). From a social constructivist perspective building these integrated groups will be a crucial component of overall social cohesion.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion encompasses many constructs but has come to generally be accepted as positive ties among group members that allow for the formation of a strong group with ongoing participation by members (Friedkin, 2004; Rios, Aiken & Zautra, 2011). In seminal studies on

group cohesiveness social psychologist John Thibaut found “the concept of cohesiveness is of central importance in the psychology of groups...a minimum amount of cohesiveness, or integrating force, is necessary for a group to exist at all” (Thibaut, 1950). The most fundamental element of social cohesion can be distilled down to the beliefs and attitudes of individuals (Friedkin, 2004). These individual beliefs translate into larger group norms of mutual trust and connection, leading to increased social networks, improved resources, and better collective group efficacy (Rios et al., 2011).

The concepts of social cohesion and group development have their heritage in several deeper and more historical theories. Decades ago psychologist Mildred Parten (1933) studied the play habits of small children and discovered several distinct phases. In one of the earlier stages children engage in what she termed parallel play occurring when several children participate in similar activities however there is no contact between each child (Parten, 1933). It was Parten’s belief that parallel play was a stage of immaturity that would eventually lead to more social types of play. She posited that following parallel play children begin to engage in associative play - where some small interest in what the other children are doing is displayed, but no coordination is made to bring activities in sync (Parten, 1933). The final stage is cooperative play in which activities become more organized and the participants show interest in what the other members are doing (Parten, 1933). Parten identified cooperative play as the highest level of play because of it’s ability to increase self identification within a group and create an emergent group entity (Parten, 1933). As children mature and their social and communication skills more fully develop cooperative play increases in frequency.

In the mid-1960’s social psychologist Bruce Tuckman used a framework similar to Parten’s and other child development stage theorist’s (such as Piaget and Vygotsky) in

synthesizing his stages of group development. Tuckman's (1965) work reveals parallels between the stages of child development, and the stages that groups go through as they develop cohesion. His research was based on studies of groups that had been brought together to complete a social or professional task (Tuckman, 1965). Tuckman proposed that there were four distinct stages of group development that he termed, "forming, storming, norming, and performing" (Tuckman, 1965).

Tuckman (1965) theorized that in the forming stage the group is figuring out their footing as an entity and look primarily to any assigned or emergent leaders for guidance. The storming stage is where many groups run off the rails into chaos as they begin to display their individual beliefs and identities in ways that can sometimes come off as hostile or aggressive, resulting in an overall lack of cohesion. In the third stage, norming, the group begins to do just that – develop norms for its continued progress. Group members begin to coalesce around the greater cause and personality quirks are blended into the developing entity. It is in the final stage of forming that the group becomes a coherent problem-solving agent. The group members are able to fully incorporate the strengths and weaknesses of each individual into roles or functions that will serve the overall achievement goals of the group (Tuckman, 1965). Tuckman's research further supported that each group stage corresponded to a task activity stage; becoming oriented to the task fell into the forming stage, emotional responses to task demands equated with storming, open and respectful exchanging of ideas connected to norming, and the emergence of workable solutions dovetailed with performing (Tuckman, 1965). One could make the argument that Tuckman's research illustrates an alignment of group development with the play stages of child development and postulate that the same sort of progression would be seen as social communities develop from isolation to group cohesion. In effect likening the collaborative play

of children with the production and completion of common group goals in the adult population. The author of this paper proposes that groups striving to develop cohesion may benefit from a foundational understanding of these two types of group progression.

The difficulty in developing social cohesion within a community lies in ensuring that members move beyond the parallel or associative activity stages to full cooperation in order to reach the social, group maturity that Mildred Parten and Bruce Tuckman identified. A school district, or a network of school districts comprising a geographical area, is a community that must work on the development of cooperative social cohesion. For some school districts this community cohesion may happen naturally, but for others the social cohesion becomes more complex. While there are many factors affecting the complexity of a community's cohesion one significant factor, and a large one for the Southern Chester County (SCC) region of Pennsylvania is increasing ethnic diversity. The school districts that comprise (SCC) contain a minority population of migrant Spanish speaking families within the larger community demographic of Caucasian middle-class families.

Currently community wide engagement in SCC can be likened to Parten's stages of play or Tuckman's stages of group development. Personal observations of the author, over a period of twenty years residing in SCC, reveal that the two populations exist side by side and occasionally notice what the other one is doing, but there is no attempt made to create cooperative groups between the ethnic minority and the majority. This is evident throughout the community starting in elementary schools, progressing through high school, and through the larger adult community. Hispanic students rarely participate in after school activities such as athletics, drama, or music. Within the schools students naturally segregate into ethnic groups at lunch and in the hallways. Community outreach programs cater to one population or the other, but rarely both. As someone

involved in education, community outreach, and other community organizations it is the author's observation that adults in the minority and majority populations give little consideration to increasing social cohesion in regards to civic groups, business organizations, or neighborhood interactions.

Whether ethnic segregation is self-imposed, purposeful, or unintentional the results are the same. This lack of social cohesion leads to a divided school district and region that is functioning as two separate entities with no accounting for the impact on the districts' youth, students, families, and community members. Establishing more cooperative and effective community groups, both in and out of the schools, could lead to increased social cohesion and utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry process may serve as a first step toward this establishment.

Building Effective Groups

When building effective groups another area that offers research-based methodologies for success, similar to social constructivism, is positive organizational scholarship (POS). POS focuses on the generative properties of organizations to promote human strengths, increase individual and collective resilience, and germinate improved human performance (Stephens, Heaphy & Dutton, 2011). POS has shown us that organizations can increase self-efficacious behavior in both employees and leaders by implementing some of the tenets of appreciative inquiry. We can extrapolate some of these organizational precepts and tools and apply them to burgeoning group cohesion. Appreciative inquiry is based on the belief all communities have strengths, and these strengths can be sanctioned as an engine to jumpstart change (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). Harnessing these strengths institutions can look at organizational change through a positive lens while working to design their ideal flourishing workplace.

Organization members who believe in their self-efficacy create ease of implementation for change at the scale of the whole and for uniting strengths across silos in order to inspire innovation (Cooperrider, 2016).

Teaching others the skills to increase these self related tools leads to well-rounded individuals who are then free to focus attention on the development of emotional intelligence. Caruso, Salovey, Brackett and Mayer (2015) define emotional intelligence as the “capacity both to reason about emotions and to use emotions to assistance reasoning” (Caruso et al., 2015, p 546). More importantly this trait allows for individuals to help facilitate thought, their own as well as that of others. An individual with a high level of emotional intelligence has the ability to not only identify and regulate their own emotions, but to recognize the emotions of others and utilize reasoning to help others feel a sense of emotional wellbeing. Organizations, and by extension groups, can encourage emotional intelligence by employing high quality connections (HQC). These connections impact individuals, teams, and organizations by positively altering physiology, building resilience, increasing overall job satisfaction and performance, as well as increasing creativity, problem solving, and collaborative learning (Dutton, 2016). HQC can be as minor as truly “seeing” and “listening to” people on a daily basis (Dutton, 2003). Improving general relationships can have lasting impact and drive true organizational and group change (J. Dutton, personal communication, April 2, 2016). Specific actions that help increase the likelihood of forming and nurturing HQCs include: encouraging all members to share their voices, establishing compassion and empathy as valued norms, and creating physical spaces that are inviting, open, and egalitarian (Arsht, 2014). By enacting the aforementioned values, group leaders can assist participants in forging and building on HQCs. HQCs also stoke positive emotions, which illuminate possibilities that facilitate upward spirals of increased self-

awareness, positive experiences with others, and positive emotions (Ewing, 2012). These upward spirals can be perpetuated into a sustainable cycle, making positive transformation a robust mechanism for meaningful change and satisfaction. Community members of SCC seeking to improve social cohesion can start with something as minor as improving HQCs across ethnic groups in grocery stores, school events, etc. while teachers and other school members can model these HQCs with students and staff. The Appreciative Inquiry process can be a tool to disseminate this effective group research in an effort to encourage contagious actions.

A second driver for improving emotional intelligence is through the use of *otherish* behavior (Grant, 2013). People who are *otherish* are able to maintain focus on their own needs, while concurrently considering how their needs may align with mechanisms for helping others (Rebele, in press). Prosociality has been found to coordinate quite closely with personal goals, affecting efficacy and autonomy (Rebele, in press). Research shows employing effective giving behavior has a positive effect on emotional intelligence, the satisfaction of employees/group members, and performance (Grant, 2013). The encouragement of prosocial behavior can be spread in a grassroots method from teachers, parents, and community members to a society's young people.

The key to establishing positive relationships is the ability to discern what type of interaction individuals need at any given time. Even introverts need a little group time, while extraverts can benefit from solitude (Cain, 2013). Wilson (2012) posits that human beings are biologically predisposed to seek out groups of people who share similar characteristics (Wilson, 2012). Gable and Gosnell (2011) found that humans benefitted from increased wellbeing when they possessed close relationships (either with a partner or with a group). These relationships allow the individual to benefit from the support of their partner/group when a stressor is

encountered. Interestingly, a stressor need not be present to show correlation between the presence of strong social ties and greater wellbeing (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). This research illustrates the positive implications for working to increase social cohesion.

Fowler and Christakis (2009) used a large longitudinal analysis to show that wellbeing can be a collective phenomenon, much like health (obesity, smoking). They report that a close-by friend or group can increase wellbeing by 30% (Fowler & Christakis, 2009). Gable and Gosnell (2011) further advance sharing positive life events with those close to you can serve to increase wellbeing and self-esteem, while decreasing loneliness and depression (Gable & Gosnell, 2011), which has larger implications when applied to social cohesion beyond the parameters of group formation.

One final tool positive organizational scholarship offers us to help build group cohesion is hive psychology. The hive hypothesis posits that the highest levels of human flourishing may be reached by occasionally losing one's sense of self while becoming part of an emerging social organism (Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008). Contrasted with hedonic pleasures that one quickly adapts to, such as a promotion or a new house, hive experiences may induce some of the most acute and durable forms of well-being by creating peak experiences i.e., the most intense part(s) of a memory (Haidt et al., 2008). This may be because they engender *communitas*, or the sense of rejuvenation and elevation one feels when merged with a group identity (Haidt et al., 2008). They also build social capital, or mutual trust and robust social connections within a community (Haidt et al., 2008). Though hive experiences are often ephemeral, such experiences can be leveraged to encourage enduring positive belongingness. To do so would be to facilitate positive transformations, which are "the long-lasting, strength-based changes in behavior, affect and cognition used to help oneself and others to flourish" (Ewing, 2012, p. 10). By not attending the

same church services, school plays, or sporting events as an ethnically diverse cohesive group, the residents of SCC are cutting themselves off from the wellbeing benefits of feeling part of a hive. Utilization of the research and theory behind the above tools will be helpful for building an effective school and community groups that can work to generate social cohesion.

Positive Psychology

In order to envision the connections between social constructivism, social cohesion, and group effectiveness in the context of human beings, and to help lay the groundwork for the importance of Appreciative Inquiry as a construct, it becomes important for us to develop an understanding of the background of positive psychology. It is this author's contention that the study of positive psychology espouses the foundational belief that the vast majority of the human population can benefit from increased wellbeing and flourishing. Not only is it important to have the most effective components functioning within a life, it is just as important to live a life of optimal experiences and levels of happiness. For our purposes the author's school of thought is not adhering to the maxim that negativity will never enter someone's life, but rather that the person will have the tools necessary to handle the bad while capitalizing and celebrating all of the good.

The concept of positive psychology was first broached in 1954 when Abraham Maslow noted in his writing that psychology had revealed a great deal about the inadequacies of the human condition but not nearly as much about the potential of human beings (Maslow, 1954). In 1998, while serving as president of the American Psychological Association, psychologist Martin Seligman began to advance his theory that general psychology as a field focused too narrowly on a deficit based methodology (Seligman, 1998). Seligman's propositions questioned the pathology related focus of psychology and posed a general call for the empirical study of

ways to help human beings flourish (Seligman, 2002). For many years the focus of psychology had been to move people away from negative mental states, such as depression or anxiety, back toward net zero and pronounce them cured (Seligman, 2011). Writing with fellow psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (2002), Seligman posited that there should be something beyond net zero, a place where a focus on holistic, global wellbeing of an individual would lead to an overall improvement in levels of life satisfaction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002). Their proposal for this endeavor could be broken down into three general areas: “a) positive subjective experiences (happiness, pleasure, gratification, fulfillment), b) positive individual traits (strengths of character, talents, interests, values), and c) positive institutions (families, schools, businesses, communities, societies)” (Peterson, 2006).

As the study of positive psychology began to expand and gain proponents, Seligman continued to refine his theories and research and eventually developed the PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA model is built on the foundational belief that individuals flourish when they are able to experience a balance of **P**ositive emotions, a sense of **E**ngagement, positive **R**elationships with others, a sense of **M**eaning and moral purpose, and the **A**ccomplishment of valued goals (Seligman, 2011). Let us take a closer look at each stage of the PERMA model. Positive emotions are those that allow our brains and bodies to feel safe and therefore able to enjoy feelings of contentment and happiness (Frederickson, 1998). Barbara Frederickson’s (1998) research into the field of positive emotions has led to the broaden and build theory espousing that when we focus attention on the positive it allows us to broaden our field of emotional inquiry and stability while at the same time offering opportunities to build on future positive emotions (Frederickson, 1998). Engagement can be characterized as “flow” or a state of effortless attention where an individual becomes so absorbed in the activities around

them that they lose track of time and emotions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). When we are intensely engaged in what we are working on in the present we are able to feel an increased sense of personal control and intrinsic reward (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Relationships and the social connections forged by them are an essential component of human wellbeing. Human beings are biologically predisposed to be part of loving and positively reciprocal relationships with others that then have a significant impact on life satisfaction (Peterson, 2006; Haidt, 2006). Meaning can be construed as a sense of purpose or calling in life. It is the feeling of being part of something greater than self that allows you to focus less on life's negatives and more on the positives in service of this greater calling, while subsequently feeling an increase in personal wellbeing (Seligman, 2011). The final stage is achievement, or the pursuit of intrinsically motivated goals for the sake of personal enjoyment rather than external gain. Individuals can experience more autonomy when their motivated behavior comes from an internal driver rather than for the sake of reward or other recognition. This increased autonomy leads to more self-determination and more willingness to continue to act in accordance with the intrinsic motivator (Brown & Ryan, 2015).

The work of positive psychology can have resonance and connection to the concepts of group and community unification by virtue of utilizing the strengths and positive characteristics of each individual group member. As cohesive communities develop there emerges a communal sense of responsibility to increase awareness and understanding of the tenets of positive psychology that will consequently impact the wellbeing of the larger community. Learning how to improve social cohesion in service of improved student success, life-satisfaction and increased wellbeing is not a quick fix to bliss, group members must be willing to invest time, and occasionally hard work will be involved, which this author has found can have a tendency to

bump up against individual's increasingly prevalent desire for instant gratification. The empirical science-based theories that continue to evolve from positive psychology will aid in the development of a solid base of understanding of the field which can be applied to both individuals and groups as a united community is assembled.

When talking about improving group and community interactions a more granular lens can be used to focus on the strengths of individuals. It is the author's belief that this understanding of individual strengths can help us to better implement the systems approach of Appreciative Inquiry by allowing people to bring their strengths to bear on the overall systems change process. The human brain is hard-wired to notice and fixate on the negatives of individual or collective life (Niemeck, 2016) while AI will ask participants to focus on what is going well within groups and organizations. Good things are sometimes much harder for people to see, especially when asked to identify those positive aspects in themselves or in members of their larger community. One method for overcoming this challenge and an opportunity to help people grow is to focus on character strengths. Positive psychology utilizes empirical research and tools to inform individuals of ways to cultivate character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and use their strengths to improve their personal wellbeing (Niemeck, 2016). Character strengths are stable traits of personality that are core to the way an individual approaches daily life. The list of character strengths was developed by a team of leading psychologists and scientists from around the world who were attempting to cultivate a listing of values and strengths that seemed most pertinent to humanity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The development of this list led to the creation of the VIA Character Strengths Survey. The survey has been taken by millions of people worldwide to ascertain instant feedback on their personal character strengths. Scientific research has found the survey instrument to be reliable and valid in its results (Niemeck, 2016). It is this

proposal's assertion that the use of the VIA Character Strengths Survey would be of great benefit to the steering committee of an AI summit as they begin the endeavor to create a unified Southern Chester County. Knowing the strengths of individuals will become more pertinent as summit participants begin to move forward into practical implementation of their AI plan, and a deeper understanding of character strengths will be pertinent to the professional development of educators.

Student Success and Wellbeing

We must endeavor not to forget that the bigger reason behind a well-functioning and cohesive community and school district is the success and wellbeing of its students. The success of those currently enrolled in our public institutions for education becomes the foundation of future generations, regardless of the student's ethnicity or race. Students who are already struggling with disadvantages at home along with strong cultural differences need more social structures in place in order to be successful and those structures must emanate from other organizations within the community in conjunction with the school districts. While change at the more broad federal and societal levels can be slow and cumbersome, it is within the power of school districts and local regions to change their own structural systems to support student success. Behavior and discipline problems in the classroom, high school drop out rates, increases in drug use, and gang related incidents, are drains on the social and emotional wellbeing of the entire community as well as having high economic costs (Putnam, 2015; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) defines a successful student as one who is "academically knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically active, artistically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency, and ready for the world beyond formal schooling" (ASCD, 2007). They further contend that this

cannot be accomplished by the schools alone but must be developed in conjunction with the larger community of stakeholders while paying particular attention to disenfranchised segments of the society (ASCD, 2007).

In Southern Chester County that disenfranchised segment is comprised primarily of Hispanic/Latino students. Migrant students who come to the U.S. and begin attending public schools may face an entirely different environment than that of their home country. For some it will be their very first formal educational experience. Alternatively for some of the educators of SCC it will be their first experience instructing students whose home language is different than their own. Personal experience as an educator leads me to believe that Southern Chester County teachers would benefit from an increased understanding of the underlying theories of positive psychology and positive education in order to help their students achieve their full potential. This could be accomplished via an educator-only professional development workshop/training to be held in conjunction with the AI summit.

A primary learning target for each individual child should be instruction on self-reflection and self-regulation. These targets cannot be instructed and reinforced solely in the classroom setting. Through the process of increasing community cohesion parents and local community members could also learn the power behind these theories and work to apply them in their homes, organizations, and businesses. The ability to reflect on who you are as a person needs to be cultivated at the youngest age that is developmentally appropriate. Mastery of self-reflective activities lays the groundwork for self-regulation. Self-regulation is a distinctly human process in which we attempt to influence control of our thoughts, feelings, impulses, and performances (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall & Oaten, 2006). The ability to self-regulate is a necessary element for success not only in school, but also in life. Studies have shown that self-regulation is like a

muscle that must be exercised in order to stay strong (Baumeister et al., 2006). And just like other muscles it can become tired and not work as effectively as it should. This over exertion of self-regulation is known as “ego depletion” (Baumeister et al., 2006). When self-regulation is depleted by exertion in one sphere of life, it can reduce self-regulation in other spheres of life. This may explain why school age children can focus for one part of the school day, then break down and lack self-regulation later in the day or at home. This can be particularly difficult if both of the student’s parents work demanding farm or factory-based jobs and the expectation is that the children will take care of each other. Temptations to ignore schoolwork, along with the demands of watching younger siblings, make it easy for young people whose self-regulation may be depleted from attending school to get into trouble. A more cohesive community would allow for some of these demands to be taken off the shoulders of migrant children and perhaps shared with an increased after-school community outreach presence. This community outreach could help with after school care for young students whose parents are working, while also providing older siblings the opportunity to get involved in afterschool activities instead of caring for their brothers and sisters. There could also be the opportunity for help with homework and project completion for students whose parents are unable to provide support due to language differences. Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall and Oaten (2006) have shown that through self-regulation exercises ego depletion can be lessened. Self-reflection and self-regulation theory can be instructed through the use of a positive psychology based curriculum and/or interventions that could focus on character strengths as a methodology for increasing understanding of self. In addition to the larger AI summit, an educator-only professional development training will be proposed to train teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals in the importance of self-reflection and self-regulation to improved student wellbeing.

Brown and Ryan (2015) believe that another important element for increasing wellbeing is a focus on self-determination. Self-determination theory prioritizes the idea of autonomy and its importance to a sense of life satisfaction. Most prior research and understanding into self-determination has been primarily concerned with the binary nature of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Psychologists now believe that motivation works on a continuum and that within extrinsic motivation there is a range of autonomy (Brown & Ryan, 2015). Integrated regulation is the highest level of autonomy within the extrinsic motivation realm. The more an individual is able to internalize and integrate regulation the higher their level of self-determination (Brown & Ryan, 2015). These findings connect self-regulation to self-determination. Self-determination is an important facet for young people (and more importantly teachers and parents) to understand because the more autonomous control an individual feels the greater their engagement, quality of learning, and psychological wellbeing (Brown & Ryan, 2015). By the adolescent years children can begin to understand the concept of motivation, and to develop self-knowledge regarding their own individually preferred motivators. Explicitly teaching the meanings of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators and how to focus attention on this aspect of self would help young people to better formulate their own theories regarding self-determination. The importance of autonomy can be conveyed during the proposed educator professional development with the intent that teachers will implement increased choice within their classrooms as well as share this research with families.

Another area in which theory can serve to provide a better foundation for our young people is self-efficacy. After development of self-regulation, self-efficacy may be the most important in allowing youth to create future success. Maddux (2009) posits that individuals need to have a solid base in believing that they can successfully do what they set out to do. Children

first begin to develop a sense of self-efficacy when they are encouraged by their parents to explore their environment. Parental support and active involvement leads a child to have a sense of agency over their choices. Parents who are frequently absent and/or do not have many connections in the community will struggle with helping their children feel connected as well. Another way that young people increase self-efficacy is through performance experiences. When an adolescent feels that their success is due to their performance in a certain area their self-efficacy beliefs increase. Those who are denied opportunities to perform successfully will need to develop self-efficacy through less effective means than first-hand encounters. Enhancing self-efficacy is beneficial to overall health, and increases resistance to disruptions in self-regulation. People with high self-efficacy are better problem solvers and can more adequately contribute to the collective self-efficacy of a classroom, school, or larger community/organization (Maddux, 2009). Using a professional development model that expands beyond just the AI summit phase could allow teaching staff to develop a deeper understanding of these tenets of positive psychology that could provide students with the skills necessary to increase self-determination and self-efficacy. A united community may be more apt to fund increased and continued professional development for teacher training if they can see the connections between theories of self and increased student wellbeing. These future needs may be a tangible by-product recognized by the Appreciative Inquiry participants.

The above theories have been established as efficacious in regards to helping people improve overall wellbeing through management of the self. More recently there has been research into a newer field, prospection theory. Seligman, Railton, Baumeister and Sripada (2013) report that this research could provide a schema allowing for the integration of multiple facets of psychology such as learning, motivation, self-control and decision-making (Seligman,

Railton, Baumeister & Sripada, 2013). Prospection is the mental simulation of future possibilities based on current values and goals in service to purpose and meaning (Seligman et al., 2013).

Developing methods to help migrant students envision a future that appears less harsh than their current reality could have amazing implications for student wellbeing and for education.

Prospection utilizes four kinds of mental processes of the future: navigational, social, intellectual and memorial (Seligman et al., 2013). Each type is necessary to allow your brain to process and evaluate the past in conjunction with the present and eventually become automatic. This automaticity frees up your mind to ponder and explore future scenarios. Researchers feel this advance in psychological theory is linked to the recent discovery of a core network in the brain that manages all four processes, known as the default network (Seligman et al., 2013). Following teacher training, students could be instructed in the practiced application of prospection in an effort to help students view positive possible futures. Educational scientists have not been ignorant of the concept of increasing student success by focusing on the future. Schmid, Phelps, and Lerner (2011) completed research that investigated how “hopeful expectations for the future” could interrelate with goal setting and self-regulation. They were specifically interested in how future orientation could help students increase self-regulation to boost overall positive youth development (Schmid, Phelps & Lerner, 2011). Their research noted that in particular Latino students showed evidence of an inability to make a connection between their future, hoped-for self and their current academic situation (Schmid et al., 2011). They advocate for specific instruction in skills related to behavior and cognition to help improve individual self-regulation, an integral part of overall student life satisfaction (Schmid et al., 2011). Teachers armed with this empirical research and continued professional development could work to provide direct instruction in self-regulation skills. Working to help students develop positive

future expectations can build resilience, but they must first have access to, and the ability to engage with, context appropriate resources (Schmid et al., 2011). It is this last step that shows a path for positive psychology to develop some empirical research surrounding what resources are most effective at helping migrant students increase prospection capabilities. The research behind prospection and forward focused thinking is a natural fit with an Appreciative Inquiry approach.

Increasing numbers of public schools (following the lead of many private and charter schools) have begun to embrace positive education, sometimes termed character education or social emotional learning. Early instruction of positive education tools can help children manage their emotions and shepherd them into greater achievement and wellbeing beyond academics. Schools around the world are beginning to implement empirically researched positive education programs with great success. Countries such as Bhutan, Australia, and the United Kingdom, have instituted wellbeing projects that focus on beginning instruction with the nation's youth (Henry, 2012).

The focus of education is slowly changing from constant scrutiny of academic success in the form of increased test scores, to personal success in the form of youth happiness and wellbeing. Much like psychologist William James (1899) asserted, we must teach our youth to develop the self-awareness to cultivate habits and actions, which will consequently lead to stronger internal states and increased levels of happiness (James, 1899). Positive education has the capacity to help students understand and operate from their strengths, embrace the possibilities of a growth mindset, and become more mindful and well-adjusted adults. As with the tenets of positive psychology, some of the research from positive education can be included in the educator professional development training, with possible future workshops and trainings to allow teachers to expand their learning. The driver for implementation of a positive education

curriculum in Southern Chester County would be the internalization and transference of this foundational positive psychology research outward to the families and community members in order to effect positive change. This learning and knowledge must not remain isolationist in nature. Using the Appreciative Inquiry approach to make change will have a ripple effect across stakeholder groups as they broadcast their learning across the community. The goal of a ripple effect across stakeholder groups can be actively pursued by increasing community interactions and connections. A community divided along ethnic and class lines must develop a type of connecting glue that will allow for the creation of environments that encourage student success. Appreciative Inquiry can serve as that glue.

Appreciative Inquiry

This paper argues that the pillars of positive psychology can be used to build a foundation for increased social cohesion in service of student and community wellbeing, and that this foundation will play a beneficial role in the creation of a united Southern Chester County. For our purposes the overarching tool for bringing about this unification will be the implementation of an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) summit. Appreciative Inquiry offers the best opportunity to incorporate all of the topics discussed in this paper into one guiding, coalesced concept to create community cohesion and improve community wellbeing.

AI traces its roots back to social constructivism and its tenets have been used with various organizational designs since the early 1980's when David Cooperrider developed his method of positive analysis completing doctoral work at Case Western Reserve University (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). Since that time use of AI as a tool for positive change has been implemented for systems both small - helping a Midwestern middle school discuss ways to meet adequate yearly progress for students (Calabrese, San Martin, Glasgow, and

Friesen, 2008), and large – developing a 1,400 member leadership summit for the United Nations (Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI has the power to make a difference in the lives of any one person or in any “collective human system” (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) write, “AI is a proven paradigm for accelerating organizational learning and transformation. It can be used in any situation where the leaders and organizational members are committed to building positive, life-centered organizations” (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

The foundation for AI rests on the belief that looking into any human system should begin with appreciation for what already exists, developing an understanding of what could be attained and what applies to the given system, the premise that the attainable should be enticing, and finally that the inquiry should be undertaken in a collaborative manner (Cooperrider et al., 2008). AI further breaks this foundation down into four distinct phases; Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny – termed the 4-D cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The stages of the 4-D cycle correspond to 1) appreciating what is, 2) envisioning what might be 3) constructing how it can be, and 4) sustaining what will be (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) further point to five principles that allowed AI to move into an effective, practical application rather than just a theoretical construct (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The Constructivist Principle which argues that questioning becomes the ultimate resource for analyzing human beings and organizations with the most generative function being the interaction between individual imagination and individual skills of reasoning (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The Principle of Simultaneity posits that asking questions and generating change are interconnected concepts: as soon as questions are posed and discussion has begun, change interventions have already been initiated (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The Poetic Principle illustrates the metaphor that human organizations are essentially “open books”,

(Cooperrider et al., 2008), and that vast amounts can be interpreted from studying these books, dependent upon if the viewing lens is one based on human creativity or human obstruction (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The Anticipatory Principle states that human systems are guided by future images and that it is inherently in our nature to shape and guide progress to this projected future (Cooperrider et al., 2008). This principle of an anticipated future ties into the research of Schmid et al, on the importance of prospection and the ability to imagine a better future based on goal setting and self-regulation skills at the individual level, (Schmid, et al. 2011) while illustrating its transference to a larger systems level. Lastly, The Positive Principle is the least abstract of the five and asserts that human systems are predominantly positive in nature and will respond much better to a sense of positive direction rather than a backward-oriented problem focus (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

Case studies of organizations employing the Appreciative Inquiry process to effect positive change, within a system are plentiful. Empirical research exists on the positive application of AI in Nepal (Nayupane & Poudel, 2012), Canada (Filleul, 2009), and South Africa (Steyn, 2012). Less well researched is the use of Appreciative Inquiry in rural areas in general (Arnold, 2005) and rural education settings in particular (Calabrese, Hester, Friesen & Burkhalter, 2010). What little research that does exist suggests the school district is the “heart of a healthy, vital rural community” (Lyson, 2002).

In 2010 the superintendent of a rural midwestern school district seeking to unite a disintegrating school community turned to a group of doctoral researchers from a nearby university (Calabrese et al., 2010). The district was faced with an aging population, the flight of younger people, an increasing drug presence, staff members resistant to collaboration, and an ever-“growing disparity between rich and poor” (Calabrese et al., 2010). Working with the

university students an action research project was undertaken by the district utilizing the Appreciative Inquiry format. The doctoral research team based their action plan on studies by Collins (2001) showing that “one of the challenges to creating and sustaining a healthy rural community is to maintain a healthy and growing school district” (as cited in Calabrese et al., 2010). Upon completion of the Appreciative Inquiry process over several day and utilizing the 4-D cycle the results of the Midwestern study showed that school district members “rediscovered competence, regained confidence, became empowered, and learned to value, respect, and dare to dream of a transformational future” (Calabrese et al., 2010). The research findings suggested that the group needed continued focus on the Destiny (or sustain) phase of the 4-D cycle however subsequent follow up revealed the district’s small school group had reached out to area “community agencies, businesses and legislative bodies” (Calabrese et al., 2010). Overall the district felt as though the action research project implementing the AI summit had been successful and that as a community they had experienced change based on a foundation of “close-knit relationships, mutual trust and collective sense-making” (Fleming, 2001).

A 2005 study focused on the application of Appreciative Inquiry among an inner-city community comprised of predominantly Hmong, Somalian, and Hispanic/Latino immigrant populations (Akdere, 2005). While focused on a more urban community than the previous rural study, its application to using AI with immigrant populations is pertinent to our review. Results of this research study reported high levels of success in “integrating immigrant communities by utilizing transformative education and lifetime learning” (Akdere, 2005) that support prior results of AI application. The study underscored findings that the heart of participatory development comes from “co-creating a common understanding based on generative communications” (Akdere, 2005). While the overall results of this study were positive for the use of AI with inner

city immigrant populations, the author pointed out the need for more studies focused on immigrant and migrant populations in order to further analyze the benefits of AI for working with these populations (Akdere, 2015).

Criticism has been leveled against Appreciative Inquiry, suggesting that its participatory nature blocks some populations from truly accessing its transformative effects (Aldred, 2011). A 2011 journal review asserted that the use of AI obscures deeper societal and structural problems by labeling them “misperceptions” (Aldred, 2011) that can be cured if we just change the light within which they are being viewed. The claim posits that AI is in effect making light of a person’s perceptions of reality and making overall “questionable assumptions” about the ease of social change (Aldred, 2011). This criticism follows the path back to positive psychology in general, as a forerunner of Appreciative Inquiry, and posits that this happiness science is in essence just applying cognitive behavioral therapy on an organizational or systems level (Aldred, 2011). The overall cautious take-away from this criticism is to note that little “critical appraisal” (Aldred, 2011) has been done on the effects of Appreciative Inquiry, and that practitioners need to be aware of, and work to negate, a propensity to minimize the needs and feelings of subcultures (Aldred, 2011).

A review of pertinent Appreciative Inquiry case studies reveals that on the whole participants experience a renewed sense of purpose and dedication toward the common good. In essence the outcome of an AI summit is a renewed sense of hope. Those involved in the summit become emissaries charged with advancing that sense of hope throughout the larger community. Snyder posited that Hope can be said to exist when the following parameters are present 1) a future oriented goal or mission, 2) a step by step plan to reach the goal, and 3) the belief that

group members have the self-efficacy necessary to make that goal a reality (cited in Calabrese et al., 2010).

Appreciative Inquiry's social constructivist roots allow for a connection to increased social cohesion while utilizing a positive framework. In order to build a more cohesive community it will be beneficial to avail ourselves of the knowledge that "people control their destiny by envisioning what they want to occur and developing actions to move toward this end result" (Cooperrider, et. al 2008). This larger AI tenet ties into prior learning about the importance of self-determination, autonomy, and efficacy for individual students, as well as for community members. AI contends that "patterns of social interaction are not fixed by nature in any direct biological or physical way therefore social conduct is capable of infinite variation" (Cooperrider, et. al, 2008). Participation in and implementation of the outcomes of an AI summit may allow all stakeholders to see that current social behaviors are not fixed, and that adaptation to accommodate the diversity of all members can and should be possible. "The most powerful vehicle communities have for changing the social order is through the act of dialogue made possible by language" (Cooperrider, et. al 2008). When as a community we have diverse groups of students and adults who do not interact in an effective and beneficial manner, the first step toward change may be to allow all parties to share their narratives, hopes, and dreams. For SCC the hope is that increased dialogue about a positive future will lead to a social order that is productive and cohesive. It is the contention of the author that an Appreciative Inquiry summit can be the kick-off and driving event to generate lasting change in Southern Chester County, that will lead to improved wellbeing for all.

Conclusion

The education, success, and wellbeing of all children become the shared mission of each and every community in the United States. On occasion bureaucracy, finance, and disparity supplant this mission. This paper has shown that the wellbeing of our children has an impact on the larger community, and that wellbeing can be increased by the elevation of social cohesion on the part of adults. Ethnic diversity within a community must be celebrated and seamlessly integrated into the larger social tapestry to allow for true parity. In Southern Chester County the minority migrant population in conjunction with the majority population can benefit from the use of positive psychology as bedrock on which to build increased cultural understanding, ensure the success and wellbeing of all students and community members, and improve social cohesion. This rural community must rally all stakeholders to co-create a common vision of the best possible future. A future that will instill a sense of hope, optimism, and joy in all residents while synthesizing and celebrating the unique strengths and talents that each individual brings to the table. This paper hopes to ignite the construction of a community that will truly become united for wellbeing.

Appendix A

Draft Letter to Propose the Development of an Appreciative Inquiry Summit

What is it that could transform Southern Chester County into one thriving community?

Understanding what gives life to thriving communities? Understanding what is happening in communities that are working at their very best? Understanding what collaborative methods school districts and communities have used that most supported their ability to thrive?

Understanding what communities do to attract, rally, and unify the best human capital?

Understanding how communities work to unite their diverse populations into one cohesive society?

Wouldn't the ability to understand or even consider the answers to these questions help to transform Southern Chester County?

This letter seeks to serve as an introduction to the proposed development of an Appreciative Inquiry Summit in the Southern Chester County region. The first phase of this proposal is to reach out to the Superintendents, and School Board Presidents of the four school districts that comprise Southern Chester County.

Appreciative Inquiry is founded on the belief that human systems thrive when focusing on what occurs when they are working at their best. Discussion and generative change takes place when this knowledge is used to ignite positive innovation, collaboration, and unification.

Southern Chester County is a region that is bubbling over with diverse success stories and ideas.

An Appreciative Inquiry Summit would be an ideal way to begin deep discussion while giving

voice to, and rallying together, all of the positive, real life examples of human success and wellbeing.

I would like to invite at least one member of each school district's administrative body to come together and form a steering committee designed to learn about and shepherd the Appreciative Inquiry process from its infancy to the final product. The first steering committee meeting would involve further explaining the science and success of Appreciative Inquiry and how its application could transform Southern Chester County into one unified and thriving community, as well as the theories behind social cohesion and community wellbeing.

This introductory meeting will be held at the Chester County Technical College on Tuesday, August 30th from 2 to 4 PM. If you, or any member of your administration is interested in attending please RSVP by Monday August 15th. If someone from your school's administrative body is unable to attend but you are still interested in learning more about the process please let us know.

Thank you and looking forward to hearing from you,

The Southern Chester County AI Proposal Group

Cc: M. Christopher Marchese, Ed.D. (Superintendent of Schools, Avon Grove School District)

Mr. David Woods (Superintendent, Oxford Area School District)

Dr. Barry Tomasetti (District Superintendent, Kennett Consolidated School District)

Dr. John C. Sanville (Superintendent, Unionville-Chadds Ford School District)

Mrs. Bonnie Wolff (President, AGSD Board of Directors)

Mr. Richard M. Orpneck (President, OASD Board of Directors)

Ms. Kendra LaCosta (President, KCSD Board of Directors)

Mr. Victor E. DuPuis (President, UCFSD Board of Directors)

Adapted from resources: Appreciative Inquiry Commons (www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

Appendix B

Draft Letter to Propose the Development of an Appreciative Inquiry Summit

What is it that could transform Southern Chester County into one thriving community?

Understanding what gives life to thriving communities? Understanding what is happening in communities that are working at their very best? Understanding what collaborative methods school districts and communities have used that most supported their ability to thrive?

Understanding what communities do to attract, rally, and unify the best human capital?

Understanding how communities work to unite their diverse populations into one cohesive society?

Wouldn't the ability to understand or even consider the answers to these questions help to transform Southern Chester County?

This letter seeks to serve as an introduction to the proposed development of an Appreciative Inquiry Summit in the Southern Chester County region. The first phase of this proposal was to reach out to the Superintendents and School Board Presidents of each of the four school districts that comprise Southern Chester County. After securing their interest, we are now reaching out to include additional members whose input and participation would be greatly appreciated.

Appreciative Inquiry is founded on the belief that human systems thrive when focusing on what occurs when they are working at their best. Discussion and generative change takes place when this knowledge is used to ignite positive innovation, collaboration, and unification.

Southern Chester County is a region that is bubbling over with diverse success stories and ideas. An Appreciative Inquiry Summit would be an ideal way to begin deep discussion while giving voice to, and rallying together, all of the positive, real life examples of human success and wellbeing.

We have invited at least one member of each school district's administrative body to come together and form a steering committee designed to learn about and shepherd the Appreciative Inquiry process from its infancy to the final product. We would very much like to have representation from your organization as well. The first steering committee meeting would involve further explaining the science and success of Appreciative Inquiry and how its application could transform Southern Chester County into one unified and thriving community. This introductory meeting will be held at the Chester County Technical College on Tuesday, August 30th from 2 to 4 PM. If you, or any member of your administration is interested in attending please RSVP by Monday August 15th. If someone from your school's administrative body is unable to attend but you are still interested in learning more about the process please let us know.

Thank you and looking forward to hearing from you,
The Southern Chester County AI Proposal Group

Cc: Mr. Randy Lieberman (President, Mushroom Festival Board of Directors)

Ms. Kathi Lafferty (Mushroom Festival Coordinator)

Mr. Leon Spencer (Chester County Intermediate Unit, Chester County School Authority)

Ms. Bonnie Wolff (President, Chester County Intermediate Unit Board of Directors)

Mr. Robert Johnson (Dean, Chester County Technical College)

Adapted from resources: Appreciative Inquiry Commons (www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu).

Appendix C

Appreciative Inquiry Proposal

United for Wellbeing: Developing Social Cohesion in Southern Chester County

Purpose: To develop a unified Southern Chester County in order to accelerate student and community member success and overall wellbeing.

Proposal: The intent of the proposal is to outline the role of Appreciative Inquiry in developing a unified Southern Chester County. The Appreciative Inquiry methodology, when applied, is a tool for exploring the “life-giving” factors of an organization or human system; it is a process of discovery. Where appreciation is alive and stakeholders throughout a system are connected in discovery, hope grows, and organizational capacity is enriched. The process will be grounded in empirical research regarding the importance of social cohesion in shepherding increased community-wide wellbeing.

The process of Appreciative Inquiry unfolds through a cycle of four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Appreciative Inquiry begins and ends with valuing that which gives life to organizations. Our goal is to discover and illuminate those values that give life to Southern Chester County, from our youngest to oldest members, and from students to business owners.

The information we collect throughout the process will be used to prepare a preliminary overview of a united Southern Chester County. The collected comments from those interviewed

will be summarized and reviewed with community leaders and officials prior to sharing at the Appreciate Inquiry Summit to be held during the 2017 Kennett Square Mushroom Festival.

Appreciative Inquiry also offers an opportunity to:

- Connect many members of diverse groups throughout the region.
- Create an inclusive community development process.
- Create a positive and growing change network.
- Sustain and enhance strategic community efforts.
- Share empirical research regarding the importance of social cohesion for community wellbeing.

Key Phases of the Proposal:

1. Phase I – Planning

- Plan process with school district administrators and Mushroom Festival organizers.
- Develop schedule for overall process.

2. Phase II – Developing Unified Beliefs Statement

- Training workshops (2-3 planned for 2016-2017); objectives for the training phase of the workshop include:
 - A. Understanding the foundations of Appreciative Inquiry, both theory and practice, as well the underlying research that supports the benefits of increased social cohesion.

- B. Ability to introduce and teach others Appreciative Inquiry with a focus on social cohesion.
 - C. An understanding of the wide range of applications for Appreciative Inquiry, in particular how AI can be utilized to improve the lives of our minority populations, students, and community members in general.
 - Data gathering is the discovery phase of Appreciative Inquiry and involves an interviewing process conducted throughout the SCC region. The process is designed to reveal the life-giving forces of the community and represent a constructive approach to collaborative change. Staff trained in Appreciative Inquiry will participate in gathering the data to be used in forming the preliminary beliefs statement.
 - Data Analysis is the consolidation of data (narrative stories) gathered during the interview sessions and represents the collective voice of the community/region. The analysis will reveal consistent themes voiced throughout the community/region and will be assembled to create the preliminary beliefs statement.
 - Designing the preliminary beliefs statement and Mushroom Festival presentation will be a collaborative effort between the four regional school districts and the Kennett Square Mushroom Festival Board of Directors.
3. Phase III – Unveil preliminary beliefs statement
- Feedback will be shared during the Mushroom Festival Appreciative Inquiry Summit in September of 2017.

- Post conference meetings will be held to review the process.

Total Invested Days:

- Training: 3 days per session x 3 sessions = 9 total days for training
- Data Interpretation: 3 days
- Mushroom Festival Summit: 3 days
- Post Summit: 1 day
- Follow-up Meetings: 3 days Total: 19 days @ 5-6 hours per day

Adapted from resources: Appreciative Inquiry Commons (www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu).

Appendix D

Preliminary Summit Design

Preliminary planning and Appreciative Inquiry Training completed with steering committee of school district and community leaders. Concurrent educator professional development to occur at each of the four Southern Chester County School Districts will be considered an adjunct to the larger AI summit with the responsibility for completion belonging to each school district driven by oversight from the AI leaders and developers. (See Appendix E.)

List of other stakeholders/community members for interview and participation:

- Owners, managers, and employees of the major mushroom farms in Southern Chester County (Kaolin Mushroom Farm, Basciani Mushrooms, Sher-Rockee Mushroom Farm, and Needham's Mushroom Farm) along with those from smaller mushroom businesses/farms.
- Representatives from local business both small and large - including businesses owned and operated by Hispanic residents. (Giant Grocery, ACME Markets, Lowes Home Improvement, Perkins Restaurant, Walmart Corporation, McDonalds, Starbucks, CVS Pharmacies, Two Stones Pub, Candy for all Occasions, The Station Ice Cream, Pizza Dei Saponi, Ruffini Barbers, Cucina Mexicana, Aurora Pizzeria – this list is not all inclusive).
- Politicians (mayors or council representatives from Kennett Square, Unionville, West Grove, and Oxford, along with regional house and senate representatives, and Governor Tom Wolfe).

- Youth sports and community organizations (Wildcats Football and Lacrosse, AGRA Sports Association, Brandywine Valley YMCA branches, The Garage Community Center, Oxford Bears Youth Football League, Kennett Unionville Titans Football League, La Comunidad Hispana).
- School district teachers and staff from all buildings that comprise the four districts
- Students from grades 6-12 in all school building that comprise the four districts.
- Representative from Avon Grove Charter School and Assumption BVM Catholic School.
- Retired community members and residents - as well as those charged with running 55+ communities (Jenner's Pond, Luther Home, Ware Presbyterian Village).
- Physicians, dentists, psychologists, and other members of the medical community, along with representatives from Jennersville Regional Hospital and Penn Family Medicine of Southern Chester County.
- Area churches and church leaders (Willowdale Chapel, Saint Rocco's, Assumption BVM, West Grove Methodist Church).
- Childcare center owners, operators, and employees (Tic Tock Day Care, West Grove Day Care Center).
- Local police, fire and emergency management personnel from each municipality along with State Troopers from the Avondale Barracks.
- Community members from varying age groups and representing multiple stakeholder populations, groups, and interests.
- Spanish (and other language) translators.

After choosing a secondary steering committee of 20-30 stakeholders, (in addition to the original steering committee) a first meeting would consist of an explanation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), social cohesion, and the positive outcomes that can occur when people focus on weaving strengths rather than dissecting problems. The steering committee should be the first adopters of the beliefs that we must unlock our communities' resources in order to foster transformative collaboration and envision the best possible future (Myers, 2016).

With the support and backing of a strong steering committee, focus can turn to gathering AI Summit participants. Our goal would be an Appreciate Inquiry Summit of approximately 250-300 community members. Ideally recruitment should begin a year prior to the actual Summit to be held in September 2017. Information about the opportunity and the Summit will be disseminated at the upcoming 2016 Mushroom Festival in order to begin to gather stakeholders from each group. A website will be created and linked to the Mushroom Festival literature. This website will be managed by several key members of each stakeholder group in the steering committee and will be linked to each corresponding stakeholder group's website (if possible). Anyone interested in participating in the interview process will submit a survey providing the steering committee with some personal/professional background and purpose for consideration in joining the group. The original and secondary steering committees will organize these applicants to determine smaller subgroups to communicate out to individually. All written and digital communication must be available in both English and Spanish, and several key members of the steering committee must be bilingual. To enlist the aid of some of the more distinguished, and/or

isolated members of the stakeholder list, a direct email, letter or visit may be necessary to explain the function, purpose, and intended outcome of the Summit. All information used to drive recruitment should explain the purpose of the Summit as outlined in the original Summit proposal.

Phases of the 4-D Cycle with Sample Scenarios: Full questioning to be developed further by the original and secondary steering committees.

- **DISCOVERY Phase (“What gives life?” To appreciate the best of what currently is.)**

The Discovery phase will allow time for the steering committees to interview any interested Summit participants and ensure a proper cross section of stakeholders. This team should be a microcosm of the SCC community at large to ensure that all voices are included (Cooperrider et al., 2008). The steering committee will develop a set of questions (to include opening, topic, and concluding questions) that will orbit around positive images and positive actions (Cooperrider, et al. 2008). It is important to interview many different members of the stakeholder groups so they begin to understand that we are working for change at the scale of the whole and uniting strengths across silos in order to inspire innovation (Cooperrider, 2016). During this phase we will work to discover the resources and strengths that each member of our stakeholder group has to bring to the table. By working diligently to ensure that a diversity of groups are represented we will ensure that we keep the focus on creating social cohesion in support of community wellbeing.

- **DREAM Phase (“What might be?” To envision impact for which the world is calling.)**

During the Dream phase we will be endeavoring to broker a dialogue between all stakeholders in such a way that the sharing of positive stories leads to energy and excitement (Cooperrider et al., 2008). This stage is necessary to get all people talking and breaking them out of their comfortable group affiliations in order to see that we all desire the same result, a flourishing community. The Dream phase will focus on just that, dreaming! We will visualize and discuss what SCC would be like if we woke up from a ten-year nap to discover utopia. What would it now look like, sound like, feel like, and how are all community members working together to make a difference on a daily basis (Cooperrider et al., 2008). Some possible utopian scenarios could center around what would interactions between students of varying ethnicities look like in the classroom or on the sports fields.

- **DESIGN Phase (“What should be—the ideal?” To co-construct a possible future.)**

The Design phase is where the nuts and bolts discussions about change implementation begin to take place. It is a methodology for closing the gap between what currently exists and what will be (Cooperrider et al., 2008). One step in this phase is to determine what element(s) will be focused on to guide change. For example, the participants may feel that cultures, shared social responsibility, interconnectedness, and communication are key design elements. Questions and discussions should challenge the existing closed paradigms and battle with ways to break those down and expand horizons (Cooperrider

et al., 2008). How exactly will we work as a community to ensure that young people cultivate friendships across ethnicities? How exactly will we endeavor to instruct adults who would like to learn English or Spanish? What types of community organizations or programs would be effective in uniting diverse neighborhoods in celebration (such as arts, sports, volunteering).

- **DESTINY Phase (“How to empower and adjust/improvise?” To sustain change.)**

Once our Summit participants have designed a possible future, it is time to move into the phase where a plan is developed to ensure forward progress. During the Destiny phase collaborative groups are created that will monitor ongoing discussion and continued positive work. Without a proper plan here the work may stagnate and people can become frustrated. It is imperative to keep the positive momentum going through pre-established check-in dates and meetings of subgroups and the steering committee. Possible subgroups could be created that contain liaisons from cross-sectional groups, such as education, business, families, community services. These groups would be charged with ensuring that ideas from the Design phase are implemented and reported back to the larger AI steering committee and the community at large.

Factors to Measure Success

The first success factor will be ensuring that everyone leaves the AI Summit with a solid understanding that they worked as a strong, cohesive system representative of the whole. Participants will have a concrete plan for the continued path of increased engagement, impact and collective action (Cooperrider, 2016). As this change agent group moves out into the

community they will carry with them the tentacles of positive and inspiring change that they can begin to implement within their own individual domains. Some tangible results that could be monitored quickly and easily would be to compare baseline and summative numbers of school students participating in multiethnic group activities. There will be easy access for locations for adults to go to learn both English and Spanish so that all community wide communication could be increased. In order to ensure that this progress maintains it's positive momentum the steering committee will meet at least once every two months (ideally once a month) to report back on the positive changes that are occurring and keep track of which areas seem to be having difficulty making positive advances. One possible example of an area that may need continuous support would be breaking down the digital divide and digital inequities. Businesses, and community outreach programs, would work together to establish a fund to help low-income and Spanish speaking families obtain Internet services and working computers so that they can access job and college information. Another area to focus continued effort is ensuring that the good works being completed are broadcast into the larger community, in effect procuring the service or finding a resident willing to take on the job of public relations and social media outreach regarding positive change in SCC. A successful AI summit in 2017, may lead to a second AI summit in 2018 to ensure continued progress. In the perfect Post-Summit vision everyone is being held accountable for their actions in making Southern Chester County a place for collaboration and connection. I believe that this future is possible, and that we can establish a flourishing community that ensures the mutual success and wellbeing of ALL community members.

Appendix E

Educator Professional Development

The Appreciative Inquiry leader working in conjunction with the steering committee, as well as qualified positive psychology and positive education trainers, will develop comprehensive professional development for all teachers, administrators, and paraprofessional staff in each of the four SCC school districts. The training will be developed and piloted with a small group of educators, throughout the 2016-2017 school year with a goal of full regional staff training delivery in August of 2017, prior to the proposed AI summit in September of 2017.

The AI leader and steering committee will issue an email survey to ascertain teacher willingness to voluntarily participate in the development and piloting of positive psychology/positive education foundational skills in the classroom. A core group of 8-10 educators from each district will be chosen to receive a series of lectures and direct instruction in the following:

- Research outlining the experiences of migrant families.
- Background of positive psychology as a scientific field.
- Foundation of positive psychology theory and its empirical basis for improved student wellbeing, including: self-regulation, self-reflection, self-determination theory and autonomy, self-efficacy, prospection theory, character strengths identification and usage, group and social development.

The purpose of this instruction and eventual implementation will be to allow the school district staff, students, parents, and community members to fully grasp how the integration of positive psychology and social cohesion can have an overall positive effect on Southern Chester County.

This direct instruction will take place over a period of three months with classes meeting twice per week for 2 hours (September 1st through December 1st). Instruction provided by qualified positive psychology/positive education leaders, (as yet to be determined, but possibly cultivated from the Chester County Intermediate Unit, and surrounding colleges/universities with a positive psychology focus).

Following the three-month direct instruction course, teachers will continue to meet collectively (following the same class schedule) for one more month to develop lesson plans that can be implemented as a pilot in various age level classrooms (December 1st – January 1st).

From January through the remainder of the 2016-2017 school year, teachers will implement this learning into their curriculum while tracking student progress and the overall efficacy of pilot lessons. Measurement instruments will be developed during the lesson-planning phase, possibly incorporated into existing classroom based assessments. Teachers will continue to meet once per month to share successes and areas where there is still need for improvement. At the close of the 2016-2017 school year, the teacher team will share their overall results with the larger AI steering committee. Throughout the summer of 2017 this core will work to construct professional development that will allow for an abbreviated workshop for all district staff and educators, to be delivered during staff in-service days in August of 2017. Full implementation of positive psychology/positive education curricular skills will begin and proceed throughout the 2017-2018 school year. The pilot team and steering committee will monitor progress and hold a follow-up meeting once every three months.

All of this continuing work will be shared with the larger AI summit in September 2017, with a follow-up and full report of success based on empirical student data to be given at the second AI summit in September of 2018.

Timeline:

- August 2016 – Solicit teacher interest in training and pilot participation.
- September 2016 – November 2016 – Teacher participant training.
- December 2016 – Teacher development of curricular pilot implementation.
- January 2017-May 2017 – Teacher implementation and measurement of impact on student wellbeing.
- June 2017 – Analysis of teacher collected data on student wellbeing and academic success.
- July 2017 - Pilot participants work to develop full-scale professional development training for all regional school district staff.
- August 2017 – Professional development delivered to all staff during pre-school in-service days.
- September 2017-May 2018 – Implementation of curriculum developed by the pilot and steering committees.
- June 2018 – Data analysis meetings and debrief with staff and committees.
- July 2018-August 2018 – Development of plan to present information to the 2018 AI summit in September during the Kennett Mushroom Festival.

Given the very large time commitment from the pilot teaching staff in conjunction with existing budgetary issues the districts will attempt to attain Act 48 credits for each teacher, as well as attempt to give occasional release time from classroom duties. There is the expectation that eventually this pilot group could become a certified training group for all of Chester County via the Intermediate Unit.

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