Taking A Strengths-Based Approach To School Improvement In A Rural Elementary School

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TAKING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A
RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation

Presented to the

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

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Doctor of Education

By

Edward Van Dyke

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TAKING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A
RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jessica. She the best person I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. She is the first person who ever truly believed in me. She is the source of all my joy and success in my life and my one true love.

“Once in a while you can get ‘Shown the Light’ in the strangest of places if you look at it right.” Robert Hunter
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Abstract

Many scholars believe that school improvement and school climate are important aspects in student learning and achievement. This study takes a strengths-based approach to school improvement as well as improving school climate. The Appreciative Inquiry action research method was used to help develop a school improvement plan and attempt to improve school climate at a rural elementary school. The Appreciative Inquiry process uses the 5–D cycle of Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Deploy to help organizations look at how and in what areas the organization is thriving in to help in areas where they are looking for better results. Data were generated from two main stakeholder groups that participated in this study: parents and faculty and staff. The data were gathered at the end of the Appreciative Inquiry process by examining what the design teams created in their groups based on the major themes revealed in the form of Provocative Propositions/Possibility Statements, Commitments, Offers and Requests and then compared to a template to see if what they created aligned with what the state said qualified as a school improvement plan. The stakeholders also participated in filling out a reflection survey at the end of the Appreciative Inquiry process to determine if the Appreciative Inquiry process had a positive effect on the school. The results found in the data were positive as they related to both helping develop a school improvement plan and having a positive effect on the school climate.
TAKING A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH TO SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Rural elementary schools face a unique set of challenges in the pursuit of school improvement, including budgetary constraints, patterns of underachievement, and poor resource allocation. However, capitalizing on successes can disrupt these patterns and foster school improvement. Notably, Logan Elementary is a historically underperforming school, achieving state academic accreditation only once prior to the past three years. The staff and students at Logan Elementary have started to see measurable progress towards academic achievement goals, an improved school climate, and improved community perceptions of and involvement with the school. In this strengths-based action research study, we seek to build on these successes for continued and sustainable progress.

Context of the Action Research Study

**Key demographic variables.** The following demographic variables were obtained through a source that remains confidential in order to maintain the anonymity of the county and schools and to protect the identity of the participants in this dissertation study. The demographic composition of this school district offers important insights into the challenges faced by its schools. The site for this action research study is a small rural public elementary school in southeast Virginia. For the purpose of this study, the names of the elementary school, high school and county have been changed to protect the identity of participants. Logan Elementary School, the focus of this study, is one of only
two schools in Wootten County Public School (WCPS) District. The other is Mitchell High School. The population of Wootten County is very small, having roughly 7,000 residents. In contrast, the land size of the county is quite expansive and it is geographically located between adjoining urban and suburban counties. The lack of development in the county presents unique challenges for its citizens. In terms of infrastructure, there are no grocery stores, requiring citizens to travel up to 20 miles to neighboring counties to purchase food, and there are only two restaurants and three gas stations. Broadband internet service is not widely available in Wootten County. Those residents who do have internet access it through satellite services.

Additionally, the median age of the Wootten County population is rising while the overall population is shrinking. Consequently, the school district’s student population is in decline. Student enrollment declined from 860 students in 2009 to an enrollment of 621 students in the 2019-2020 school year. At the time of this study, Logan Elementary School enrolled 335 students, Pre-K through Grade 6. The demographics of the student population of Logan Elementary School reveals the diversity of the student population, with 52% African American, 33% Caucasian, 6% Native American, 0.7% Native Hawaiian, 0.5% Hispanic, and 7% two or more races in the 2018-2019 school year.

Economic challenges are part of the demographic foundation of Wootten County schools. Seventy-one percent of Logan Elementary School students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch, and students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch meet the federal reporting category for being economically disadvantaged ([Masked Reference], 2019). For reference, only one third of the 132 counties in the Commonwealth of Virginia have a free and reduced-price lunch percentage that is over 60%.
There are 64 students who are eligible to receive special education services, representing 19% of the total student population, which is 6% higher than the state average. The majority of these identified special needs students are served in inclusive service delivery models in general education classrooms; however, the division also maintains a self-contained classroom setting for preschool and one self-contained classroom for primary students and services. Additional special needs students are educated in off-site facilities due to their more challenging service needs through Community Services Act funding. WCPS has a small population of students, less than 1%, who are of Limited English Proficiency, with Spanish being the predominant primary language for these students and their families.

Student demographic makeup is only part of the picture. Over the past three years, Logan Elementary School has seen an average 25% turnover in faculty, which can be attributed to several factors. The pay rate for the teachers in WCPS is the lowest in the region and one of the lowest in the state. The medical insurance rates are as much as 50% higher compared to other nearby school districts. Furthermore, the majority of the faculty and staff commute on an average of 25 minutes or more to work each day, making the cost of commuting to Logan Elementary a significant budgetary concern for faculty and staff. These cost considerations coupled with low salary and cost of insurance create a severe budgetary dissonance for faculty and staff that results in a work environment highly susceptible to rapid turnover.

A negative climate and the new path forward. Four years prior to the advent of this study, I was selected as the new elementary school principal, along with a new assistant principal, and we saw the impacts of these demographic statistics firsthand. The
assistant principal divides her time between the elementary school and the high school. Upon our appointments to the leadership of the school, the Superintendent and the Director of Human Resources reported to us that Logan Elementary School has had an unfavorable reputation throughout the community, largely because of the lack of academic achievement. The community had lost trust in the school’s ability to properly educate the students, as well as developed a mistrust of the institution’s overall policies, procedures, and practices. These claims were further substantiated by the school leadership committee, teachers at the school, and conversations with the PTA board. This negative climate caused a cycle of blame between the parents, students, and the school for poor student academic achievement scores, as well as hampering the ability to establish any real sense of partnership between the school and the community.

During our tenure at Logan Elementary School, the assistant principal and I enacted several changes that resulted in advancements towards school improvement. Student academic achievement data from the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years show that Logan Elementary School is improving. Students achieved sufficient academic success in the three years prior to this study for Logan Elementary to achieve full accreditation by the Virginia Department of Education, meaning that at least 75% of the students in grades three through six showed proficiency on the state end of the year Standards of Learning (SOL) test for reading and at least 70% of the students in grades three through six showed proficiency on the state end of the year SOL test in math.

Although these data are encouraging, they do not tell the entire story of the school. The plans our administrative team made for school improvement were motivated by a sense of urgency to fix what we saw as problems within the school by implementing
improved academic practices. We also wanted to ensure that the best interests of students remained in the forefront of what we collectively wanted to achieve. For instance, year-end summative student achievement data showed that the school’s main academic deficiency was in reading. In response to these data, our administrative team set out to improve the reading scores of the students at Logan Elementary School, resulting in the discovery that the few reading programs at Logan were being delivered without consistency. In response, the administration implemented a new reading program in the school across all grade levels. We trained the teachers in the new reading program before the start of school, delivered professional development throughout the year to reinforce the implementation of the program with fidelity, and used the new reading program as the basis for classroom observations throughout the year. The focus of the reading curriculum being delivered consistently and with fidelity helped both students and teachers identify what were the ongoing and potential issues for reading comprehension, and how we as educators could overcome those obstacles. It was our hope that the changes made would show measurable gains for the school within three years. The fact that the school showed academic gains as shown through SOL achievement scores in reading leading the school to accreditation status in just one year validated our decision to make changes in the curriculum and indicated that we were on the right track to meet academic school improvement goals.

These changes were initiated by the administration looking at the deficits of the student performance in the school without involvement from any other stakeholder groups. Although the results of the changes have been positive, we as an administrative team feared we are missing the contribution of perspectives from other key stakeholder in...
the school that would potentially move the school’s climate forward in a positive way. We felt that with these additional viewpoints, Logan Elementary School could better meet its potential. We aspired to build a school community where stakeholders feel the school’s climate is healthy and productive, where the employees are doing their best work, feel valued, and have input into the direction of the school, and where the students are achieving at the highest academic levels possible. We hoped to accomplish this by improving the school climate through the process of this study.

**Opportunities and Challenges Facing Rural Schools**

Like other rural agricultural counties, WCPS has its share of challenges. Rural schools face the same accountability demands placed on them as other schools, yet face unique social, economic, and environmental obstacles when meeting these accountability standards. Regardless of what challenges rural schools face, it is the responsibility of the school administration and its stakeholders to develop a plan to improve student achievement that fits the specific needs of the students and the surrounding community.

**Opportunities and advantages of rural schools.** Rural schools have the potential to serve as the focal point of the community to which they belong, primarily because “rural school and rural communities exist in a unique symbiotic relationship” (Chalker, 1999, p. 231). The rural school is often the center of most events that occur in a community, and consistently the rural school provides the most community jobs, adding yet another important economic and social dimension to the community. According to Chalker (1999), “vision, when developed collaboratively between the rural school and rural community, creates a powerful force that cultivates the development of a greater
sense of community” (p. 231). As a result, the community and the school have the potential to create relationships that improve the education of its students.

Another advantage of rural schools is smaller class sizes. With fewer students, there is a better opportunity for teachers to offer more personalized and differentiated instruction to students. There is considerable research supporting the claim that students in smaller class settings spent more time on task, less frequently misbehaved, and performed at higher levels on assessments (Achilles, Finn, & Pate-Bain, 2002). Therefore, with smaller class sizes of 12-16 students, the education environment can be more conducive to educational progress.

**Challenges facing rural schools.** Having a smaller student population is a double-edged sword, as rural schools are more likely to be “geographically isolated" (Nagle, Hernandez, Embler, McLaughlin & Doh, 2006, p. 3) from the community, and face a losing numbers game in terms of financial allocation. Funding for schools is regularly based on student population; therefore, rural schools face an uphill funding issue due to the lack of students.

Declining student populations is an issue driven and perpetuated by rural poverty. Historically, rural communities have, “experienced what happens to their communities when policies centered on market ideology and ‘efficiency’ are created and implemented” (Butler, 2014, p. 597). During the 20th century, these efficiencies drove the idea that farmers should plant crops that made the most money and they should plant those crops on the biggest amount of land possible. Bigger farms and emerging technology meant that the need for laborers dwindled and, as a result, there was a huge population loss in rural communities (Carr & Kelafas, 2009). Creating bigger farms in
conjunction with a movement towards economic efficiency caused rural ghettos in many rural communities and subsequently rural communities have not recovered from the effects of these policies and economic reforms, and the lasting effects (Davidson, 1990).

Having economic opportunity taken away in this way may contribute to a lack of trust between rural citizens and institutions. These trust issues may potentially lead to an increase of a difficult learning environment for stakeholders and students. If school change is going to materialize, rebuilding of relationships based on trust must take place between stakeholders and the school.

**Balancing opportunities and challenges through relationships.** Relationships with stakeholders are integral to the optimal operation of schools, and educators can leverage existing relationships to strengthen trust as “people are just more willing to follow someone with whom they have a relationship” (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 290). Relationships between the schools and parents, teachers and students, and teachers and administration, have the potential to bolster trust between the parties involved, which increases each time parents put their students on the school bus in the morning, or drop them off at the front door of the school, with the belief that the school will keep each student safe and provide a quality education. Tschannen-Moran (2004) defined trust as, “one’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent” (p. 17). To create this standard of trust in relationships between educators and stakeholders, parents and students need to know that they are cared about and that they matter to the organization. Because “parents who trust educators to care for their children are confident that the educators will consistently act with the best interests of their children in mind; that their children will be treated not
only with fairness but with compassion” (Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 19), it is crucial to establish trusting relationships when enacting school improvement to increase stakeholder buy-in. Building trusting relationships with stakeholders is essential to making effective school change; therefore, school leaders who prioritize relationships and relationship building make school improvement and school change processes easier to enact.

**Statement of Action Research Problem**

The rationale for this action research study is the need for Logan Elementary School to garner stakeholder input to continue the established improvement path and to help identify additional areas for enhancement. This study will take a strengths-based approach to school improvement through the action research process of Appreciative Inquiry (Dole, Moehle & Godwin, 2014; Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011; Whitney & Trosten Bloom, 2010). The intention of this research approach is to see the school improvement process from a positive point of view, where the experiences and feelings about the school and its potential are highlighted and explored, rather than focusing on the deficits of the school and its community. In the four years since the current school administration took over, the administration has attempted to meet challenges faced by the school by identifying problems, analyzing possible causes of these problems, generating strategies, and implementing solutions. However, by taking a “problem first, solution second approach” the school is perceived as a pain point or a deficit that needs to be dealt with, rather than a place where positive interactions abound, and the school improvement is successful. It is crucial that the school and the school improvement process be seen by all stakeholders in a positive light to foster motivation for sustainable
improvement over time paired with continuous community support. It is with this approach that the Logan Elementary administrative team hopes to integrate stakeholders in the school improvement process so that members of the school community contribute to, understand, support, and recognize the value of the school improvement process. The goal of this holistic approach to school improvement is to advance the school’s climate while at the same time preventing unintended consequences of not including stakeholders in the process.

In this study, I acknowledge that the lack of a strength-based approach to school improvement has potentially eroded the trust of the WCPS community which in turn hinders current and future school improvement efforts. Because of this, we explored positive methods of improving the efficacy of school improvement plans. The two primary requirements to improve efficacy are nurturing positive changes to the school’s internal and external climate, as well as seeking out and incorporating insight from stakeholders to foster community buy in and mutual trust.

**Need for change in school climate.** For the purpose of this study, school climate was defined as the set of behaviors, feelings, and environmental quality of a school (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hoy, 1990; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). The current administrative team has invested in several significant changes in the school’s climate in an effort to improve the school, support and nurture the staff, and improve partnerships with students’ families; specifically, the immediate priority of the administration was to improve the climate of the school environment. Notable obstacles hindering a healthy environment at Logan Elementary are readily apparent. Approximately ninety percent of Logan Elementary faculty had at least one letter of reprimand from previous...
administrations, none of which were linked to records of actual teacher observations. Most written reprimands were for minor infractions such as dress code violations. It was evident that the teachers were used to administrators who were more focused on catching them doing something wrong rather than supporting them in the classroom. Another detriment to healthy school climate was inconsistency. The school had several different logos for its mascot, which resulted in different letterheads on memos and letters to parents, as well as general décor, which was disorienting and confusing at best to most members of the school community, especially to those visiting the school for the first time. Furthermore, there were no current faculty pictures or student artifacts on display around the school. The inconsistencies in the building’s décor as well as the patterns evident in employee files suggested that the climate at Logan Elementary lacked warmth, approachability, and acceptance. Although many of the past issues have been addressed, the damage done by years of neglect to the school climate still linger. Both teachers and parents continue to discuss with the administration about decisions “in years past” that impacted them negatively and caused them to expect the worst of the school and the administration, which demonstrates a clear need for further healing and improvement in the school climate. The climate of a school is a key factor the administrators need to consider as they strive to improve overall student achievement (Van Horn, 2003; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004). Having a healthy school climate provides administrators the primary tools with which to engage in change (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), and, as such, is a necessary component to aiding school improvement.

**Need for stakeholder input.** In all areas of the school, meeting the needs of the stakeholders is important, and the most important facet of meeting those needs is
incorporating stakeholder input and fostering a sense of collaboration. Conversely, the noninvolvement of stakeholders in the school improvement decision process is detrimental to the sustainability of the positive change, primarily because family involvement in school has been shown to be critical to student success (Constantino, 2016; Epstein, 2007). Furthermore, asking for stakeholder input in the school improvement process is vital so that stakeholder voices are being heard and are contributing to the betterment of the school, especially when attempting to create a more positive climate in the school.

Without stakeholder input, we may make decisions about school improvement that are not based on actual needs of stakeholders and may potentially overlook crucial opportunities to improve Logan Elementary School. One unintended consequence of noninvolvement of stakeholder input occurred during a parent engagement night on a Wednesday evening. Unbeknownst to our administrative team, a large percentage of the families in Wootten County participate in midweek activities at the various churches in the county and subsequently, there was very poor turnout at the parent engagement evening. Upon consulting the Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) board, administration quickly realized that stakeholder input was critical to plan for as many unknown variables as possible. These unintended consequences of neglecting stakeholder input could be avoided by incorporating stakeholders in the decision-making process of school improvement planning.

It is important to understand the demographic constraints of the stakeholders included in this study. The stakeholders participating in this study are the faculty and staff of Logan Elementary School as well as the parents and families of the students.
Although I recognize that there are several other stakeholder groups associated with Logan Elementary School, such as central office staff, community business partners, taxing citizens who do not have students in the school system, and county supervisors, I decided not to include other stakeholder groups beyond the parents of students and the faculty and staff at Logan Elementary School. I made this decision because this is the first time that the Appreciative Inquiry strengths-based process has been used at Logan Elementary school and we identified parents and faculty and staff as the most directly interactive with day-to-day school operations. I also recognize that the students who attend Logan Elementary School are also stakeholders. Logan Elementary serves students from the ages of 3-11 years, and, due to the average age of the student body and ability to cognitively grasp the Appreciative Inquiry process, I also decided to leave the students out of this action research study.

**Initial efforts to implement stakeholder input.** Our administrative team at Logan Elementary School wanted to form better relationships with stakeholders to improve the ability to enact school improvement and realize positive change. This meant parents being more involved in the education of their students by considering Logan Elementary as a place they feel welcome. Studies on family involvement show that involvement with students is fundamental to the academic achievement (Christian, Morrison, & Bryant, 1998; Constantino, 2016; Marzano, 2003; McBride & Lin, 1996; Muller, 1998; Singh et al., 1995). However, based on information given to the administration from the PTO board, Central Office staff, yearbook pictures and faculty input, prior to the current administration, there were few events that involved families, or even invited families to come to the school. The only two events that invited family
involvement were Grandparents Lunch and Field Day. Both events were social in nature and neither had an academic component attached to the event. The administration felt that to improve the school, programs that were available to the families needed to have some form of an academic component to it; furthermore, their opinion of how the school was academically operating was necessary and important.

To resolve the lack of family participation in school events and to make the community feel more welcomed as a part of our school, we partnered with the newly elected PTO board. Before school started in the first year of the new administration, we had a meeting with the PTO board that developed a plan for a variety of family-centered events throughout the year. Each of the events was designed to have the families come to our school and enjoy an activity, provide information about what we were doing academically as a school to support their children, and provide fellowship among the administration, staff, and community. Additionally, at each of these events, we tracked which students attended the programs we provided and asked for simple input from the participants in the form of an anonymous survey about how they felt about the event and how we could improve on the experience.

To improve communication between stakeholders and the school, the administration started using the existing phone blast technology to give a weekly call to all families to discuss what was coming up in the next week. The administration also began a weekly Thursday folder communication home to parents that included a classroom or grade level newsletter detailing the topics that were going to be covered with their students and any classroom information that would help further inform parents of the academic progress occurring in the school. Clearly communicating information on
all school programs, policies, transitions, and reforms was an important step in garnering community buy in to the school (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

**Action Research Approach**

This study took a strengths-based approach to obtaining the stakeholder input needed to develop an effective school improvement plan. This study was intended to gather input from families, teachers, and staff in a positive light so the information necessary for school improvement could be achieved with an emphasis on how to build upon what was already going well within the school. The goal of this process was to gather information to help formulate a school improvement plan with the information received through the Appreciative Inquiry process and not to create a school improvement plan using the Appreciative Inquiry process alone. Although the administrative team was looking forward to gaining the information gathered through the Appreciative Inquiry process, the process was not intended to garner all the information that is necessary for a comprehensive school improvement plan. The Appreciative Inquiry process was selected to give insight into what areas of the school were working at their best and seizing on that information to help with the overall school improvement plan. The school administration was hopeful the school improvement process would energize these stakeholders toward making Logan Elementary School the best possible place for its students to learn and to grow by keeping a positive focus on the school and its vision of the future.

The approach used for this study was the Appreciative Inquiry action research model. This framework is grounded in social constructivism which is a form of research that focuses primarily on identifying multiple values and perspectives through qualitative
data gathered from participants (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Appreciative Inquiry is a form of action research that is based on examining the positive aspects of an organization as perceived by the stakeholders of that organization in to make institutional change rather than a deficits-based reaction to institutional needs (Watkins et al., 2011). Appreciative Inquiry has eight principles that are at core of its action research model, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Appreciative Inquiry</th>
<th>Core Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructionist Principle</strong></td>
<td>Change is made through conversations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simultaneity Principle</strong></td>
<td>Change begins to take place the moment new questions are asked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poetic Principle</strong></td>
<td>We can choose what we inquire about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anticipatory Principle</strong></td>
<td>The more positive and hopeful the images are of the future the more positive the present-day action will be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Positive Principle</strong></td>
<td>Positive questions lead to positive change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Wholeness Principle</strong></td>
<td>Giving all stakeholders a voice elicits creativity and builds collective capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Enactment Principle</strong></td>
<td>To make the change we must be the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Free Choice Principle</strong></td>
<td>Free choice stimulates organizational excellence and positive change.</td>
</tr>
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By using this theoretical framework and looking at school improvement from a positive light, Logan Elementary School began the process of developing a positive vision of the future and identifying future beneficial gains for its students. Through this study we hoped to uncover what the targeted stakeholders felt we were already doing well as a school and take that information, develop a plan for implementation using the
Appreciative Inquiry process, and eventually apply it to the various needs of the school, with the end result of Logan Elementary School optimizing its established strengths in all areas of the school.

**Action Research Questions**

The action research questions served as a guide throughout this study. These questions helped us explore the extent to which the school improvement plan developed by the stakeholders and administrative team met the guidelines outlined by the Virginia Department of Education as well as track the stakeholder’s perception on the effectiveness of Appreciative Inquiry on the school improvement process.

**Action Research Question 1:** To what extent did the Appreciative Inquiry process at Logan Elementary School help lead to a school improvement plan that meets the Virginia Department of Education School Improvement Plan guidelines?

**Action Research Question 2:** To what extent did the participants perceive the Appreciative Inquiry process to contribute toward a positive school climate?

**Definitions of Terms**

- Appreciative Inquiry – Action research using a strengths-based approach to making organizational change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).
- Culture – The values and norms of the organization (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hoy, 1990; Miner, 1995)
• Employee – Employee of the school is defined as an administrator, faculty member, staff member, custodian, food service worker, or bus driver.

• Life-Giving Forces – Things that bring to or are in and a part of an organization that makes the organization the most healthy, vibrant and working at its best as well as symbiotically with related communities (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

• Stakeholder – Specific members of the community that have a personal interest in Logan Elementary school as an employee, a parent or family member of a student. Students of Logan Elementary and taxpayers of Wootten County are also stakeholders, but they were not included in this study.

• Strengths-Based Approach – Using positive examples of how an organization flourishes as it interacts with interior and exterior organizational stakeholders to make organizational change (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this Appreciative Inquiry action research study of a small rural elementary school, the review of the related literature will concentrate on two main areas. Since the ultimate goal of the study is to bring about school improvement at Logan Elementary School, the first part of the review of related literature will examine school improvement. The second section of the review of related literature will investigate the importance of stakeholder involvement in school improvement. Finally, this review of the related literature will examine school climate and its role in school improvement.

School Improvement

Historical need. School improvement initiatives in the era of school accountability have roots in the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report brought to the forefront of the public attention the quality of education being received by students in public schools and, as a result, a public demand for change in education quality and equity. The report concluded that graduating high school seniors were mediocre at best and unprepared for college as well as the workforce because of their education system failed them (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Fifteen years later, another report further discussed the need for public education reform in the report, *A Nation Still at Risk* (Bennet et al., 1998). This report advocated for establishing and assessing students in
national standards in curriculum subject areas, as well as the need for teachers who were highly qualified within the content areas they were teaching. It was not until the advent of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2002, and again in the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, that school accountability for standards-based education was mandated by federal law. NCLB focused mainly on testing and achievement, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and highly qualified teachers (NCLB, 2002). Schools were mandated to report how their students were achieving academically, as well as what exact steps poor performing schools would take to make AYP for students who were not measuring up to acceptable pass rates. Furthermore, federal funding was attached to these two laws to ensure that states would comply with the new federal mandates. If schools were not performing up to standards and schools were not taking the appropriate research-based steps to improve student scores to show AYP, there would be consequences enforced by the government (NCLB, 2002). With the passing of ESSA which replaced NCLB, the AYP goals were replaced with annual measurable objectives (AMO) that needed to raise achievement in the areas of mathematics and reading (ESSA, 2015). These two pieces of federal legislation brought school accountability with regards to student achievement and a need for formalized school improvement plans for all public K-12 schools as essential areas of consideration and processes of public school operation.

As with federal legislation intended to help schools improve, states also have guidelines to help guide school improvement. Federal and state mandates require schools to take the time necessary to complete school improvement plans and to publicly explain how they intended to show student growth. A typical school improvement plan answers the five critical questions of the planning cycle: “1. Where are we now? 2. Where do we
want to go? 3. How will we get there? 4. How will we know when we get there? 5. How can we keep it going?” (Holcomb, 2009, p. 2). These questions act as a guide along the continuum to ensure that the school improvement plan process is fulfilled. All schools are required to adopt school improvement process that make sure that they can demonstrate how they are planning to improve student academic achievement scores.

School improvement plans vary from school to school based on student need. The school plans incorporated topics such as curriculum and instruction, school organization, professional development and school operations. Once the area of improvement is selected, schools have the autonomy to choose from the governance models established within the division (Marsh, Strunk, & Bush, 2012).

A strong school improvement plan emphasizes collaboration between leadership, staff, and students. According to Fowler (2013), “education policies must be implemented at the grassroots level—by district administrators, principals, and classroom teachers. Therefore, the success of implementation depends upon motivating educators to implement the new policy and providing them with the necessary resources” (p. 18).

For example, in one study performed in a rural high school, Chance and Segura (2009) state,

Through [the school improvement] process, teachers clearly defined their tasks as (a) developing essential outcomes, (b) aligning the curriculum, (c) developing common assessments, and (d) gathering student work and analyzing these data. These tasks were accomplished through a process of “teacher to teacher” dialogue and provided a framework for peer accountability and follow-through that eventually resulted in increased student achievement. (p. 8)
Additionally, student improvement planning should be continuous and adaptive to meet the changing needs of the student body and faculty, as Schmoker (1999) asserted, “if we consistently analyze what we do and adjust to get better, we will improve” (p. 56). The success of school improvement efforts relies heavily upon the ability, or willingness of stakeholders to embrace improvement planning as a collaborative and continuous process that maps data to accomplishment and success to inform future decisions.

**School improvement as organizational change.** Any organizational improvement process is at its core, a process of change. For organizational change to take place, it is important to acknowledge and understand the change process. Fullan (2001), argued that to understand the change process is to “develop a mind-set and action set that are constantly cultivated and refined” (p. 34). Inconsistencies between the change mind-set and change action set result in bottlenecking the implementation of new processes, or the replacement of old ones. For example, occasionally, action-minded leaders may put too many new interventions into place to bring about change and can overwhelm, or confuse those in the organization (Goleman, 2000). Organizations who are going through the change process and enact several interventions at the same time in the name of innovating may not be the most successful. Organizational change is something that happens over time and requires stakeholders to have the ability and desire to make the change happen from both a strategic and logical perspective. Organizations “must learn the difference between competing in a change marathon and developing the capacity and commitment to solve complex problems” (Fullan, 2001, p. 37). Successful change requires a balance between goals and feasibility; therefore, organizations need to allot enough time for the change to systematically take place.
The Importance of Stakeholder Involvement in School Improvement

Several frameworks discuss building stakeholder coalition as a driving force behind organizational change (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spencer, 1990; Fullan, 2001; Hoy & DiPaola, 2007; Kotter, 1996; Marzano et al., 2005). A stakeholder coalition is made up of several members of the school community from a variety backgrounds and interactions with the school with a common understanding of equality among them. Anderson (1999) defined equality as an “ideal of social relations, in which people from all walks of life enjoy equal dignity, interact with one another on terms of equality and respect, and are not vulnerable to oppression by others” (p. 615). Researchers have proposed that schools have greater student academic success when leadership includes an equal and diverse group of stakeholders in the decision-making process (Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Having this cross-section of people invested in schools and student success can further increase buy in from other stakeholders and allow all members of the school community to feel heard and represented. By increasing the chance of widespread stakeholder buy-in, stakeholder advances the school improvement process and thereby fosters student achievement.

As good as any idea is on paper, there will always be those who are hesitant to adopt new change because they do not agree with some aspect of the implementation. While it is easy, or perhaps even tempting, to disregard these voices to see change successfully implemented, it is these people that leaders should listen to rather than disregard to get an understanding of the entire organization, as “those who resist have something important to tell. People resist for what they view as good reasons. They may see alternatives we never dreamed of. They may understand problems of implementation
that were never seen by the leaders” (Maurer, 1996, p. 49). Successful organizations welcome constructive pushback from stakeholders. The people who oppose change initiatives need to have their opinions listened to and on some levels even validated. They may “have ideas that have been missed, especially in situations of diversity, or complexity, or tackling of problems for which the answer is unknown” (Fullan, 2001, p. 42). It is impossible for every aspect of every implementation to be thought of from the outset. Hearing contradicting perspectives about implementation can help with the implementation process as a whole not only by identifying previously unconsidered variables, but also increasing the perception of the naysayer that they are heard and respected and are therefore more likely to support the final change plan as a whole.

In some cases, resistors should be closely managed because “in even the most tightly controlled and authority bound organization, it is so easy to sabotage new directions during implementation” (Fullan, 2001, p. 43). Principals need to be confident in the fact that they have established the necessary processes and procedures to deal with the most ardent and stubborn resisters of change who may be a true detriment to overall progress. Leadership must also possess a well-equipped toolbox of management styles in to maintain positivity among stakeholders even between those who are starkly, angrily, or irrationally opposed.

**Parental involvement in school improvement.**

Both in the NCLB Act in 2002, and again in ESSA in 2015, certain areas within the law mandate a focus on parental involvement and parent engagement in schools, especially in those schools categorized as Title 1 schools. (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2002). NCLB refers to “involving parents in their interaction with schools” while ESSA evokes
“engagement of families.” This distinction is important because involvement implies that something is being done to someone where engagement implies doing something with someone (Ferlazzo, 2011). ESSA requires a local education agency to maintain a district written parent and family engagement policy. School districts are required to do outreach to all parents and family members and implement programs, activities, and procedures for the involvement of parents and family members (ESSA, 2015).

Several studies indicate that parental engagement in their student’s academic life leads to better partnerships with schools and better student academic achievement (Bridgeland, DiIulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008; Constantino, 2016; Hong & Ho, 2005; Jeynes, 2007; Marzano, 2003; Popham, 2008; Shirvani, 2007; Stewart, 2008). Parental engagement in the educational process with students involves different definitions and levels of interaction such as “including families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through the PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and school improvement teams is important in decision making” (Epstein et al., 2009, p. 15). That being said, the onus is on the school and its leadership to foster relationships with parents that keep them informed of engagement opportunities.

Several frameworks on parental involvement and engagement in schools stress the importance of fostering parent-school partnerships, and particularly emphasize the importance of including parents in decision making to help improve student academic achievement (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2006/2007; Constantino, 2016; Epstein et al., 2009; Lawson & Lawson, 2013). These frameworks describe logical components of parent school partnerships which include: communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community and provide examples of
parental engagement and involvement. According to Epstein (2005), each type of involvement leads to different results for students, teaching practices, parents, and school climates; therefore, schools must select which practices will assist with achieving the goals set for student success and for creating a climate of partnerships.

There may also be some unintended consequences of involving parents in the decision-making process. There may be participants who have a specific agenda, or concern that they want to see addressed that has nothing to do with the issues being discussed. There may be parents who will not be willing to see any other point of view except their own. As stated by Touchton and Acker-Hocevar (2011):

Stakeholders often lack information or expertise for participating in decision making and expected decisions based on group decision making may not occur.

Stakeholders often want to be involved in the decision-making process, but do not want to be held responsible or accountable for a decision’s implementation, or outcome. (p. 210)

Therefore, involving parents in the school improvement process is important, but there could be unintended consequences of involving them that come to light during the process.

**Teacher involvement in school improvement.**

Although all stakeholder roles are important when it comes to input into school improvement efforts, Fullan (2008) commented on the particular benefits of involving faculty and staff as stakeholders in school improvement, writing, “School quality depends on the symbiotic relationship that exists among those included in school improvement efforts. It is helping all employees find meaning, increased skill development, and
personal satisfaction in making contributions” (p. 25). The school improvement process needs to include employee and staff members who traditionally may not be included in the school improvement process to get their perspective on how the school can best help student achievement. Markavitch (1994) advocated incorporating cafeteria, office, and custodial staff members in planning for improved effectiveness within their specified work roles, which also supports an environment more conducive to learning. Reeves (2010) argued that,

The most effective principals understand that custodians, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and every adult in the system is a teacher through behavior, their interactions with students and parents, and their specific actions any time they are on the job. They understand that there is a difference between a job that is described as “driving a bus” and one that is described as “caring for the lives of children and getting them safely from their home to school and back.” (p. 7)

Inclusion of the employee stakeholder in the school improvement process can be beneficial. Their perspectives on how they see the school and what needs to be changed to improve the overall school experience is invaluable. Furthermore, to include them in the school improvement process can promote a healthy workplace environment that stimulates employee potential and cooperation, which contribute to the attainment of organizational goals (Carlson, Clemmer, Jennings, Thompson, & Page, 2007). Hattie (2009) contended that educational leaders need to engage with their teaching staff in ways that inspire them to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose such that they work collaboratively to overcome challenges and reach ambitious goals.
Having teachers involved in the school improvement process and making sure that their voice is heard is essential. Excluding teachers from decisions that impact them, or subjecting them to external pressures without a voice, has a dehumanizing and demoralizing impact on educators (Knight, 2011). Many school interventions implemented in school improvement initiatives involve the classroom, which means that not including teachers as boots on the ground in the school improvement process may have unintended consequences. Ingersoll (2003), argued that teachers not being involved in decision-making about the work they do undermines a teachers’ ability to feel that they are doing worthwhile work. Once teachers are asked for their opinions on how to improve schools, they become empowered to participate in school improvement planning and a collective sense of efficacy increases (Mayer, Donaldson, LeChasseur, Welton & Cobb, 2013). Benefiting from teacher stakeholder knowledge and experience can be an invaluable way to effectively implement school improvement and change not only by obtaining essential perspectives on school operations, but also by creating a sense of collaboration that erases the “us versus them” mentality and increases overall buy in and support for institutional change.

**School Climate and its Role in School Improvement**

There have been several studies conducted on positive school climate (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). One common theme these studies reveal is the contention that school climate is affected by different stakeholder groups that include, but are not limited to students, parents and faculty and staff. Student, faculty and staff, and parent perceptions of school climate can also be positively related to student academic
achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Kim, 2015; Johnson & Stevens, 2006; Jones & Shindler, 2016). Research has also demonstrated that a positive school climate is associated with higher motivation and improved social and behavioral outcomes for students (Klein, Cornell, & Konold, 2012). Furthermore, VanLane et al. (2009) maintained that “positive school climates can lead to positive outcomes for staff, including increased job satisfaction and reduced stress and burnout. For students, positive school climates are associated with positive academic outcomes and improved behavior” (p. 46). Therefore, school climate can be seen as an important link between both student academic achievement and faculty job satisfaction.

There is also a link between the importance of positive school climate and school improvement. “The comparison of the school’s climate and culture to the proposed school improvement and school improvement process allows planners to decide whether to proceed or not with the effort” (Lindahl, 2011, p. 23). The developers of the school improvement plan can either decide to go forward with the school improvement plan initiative or concentrate on an issue within the school climate to develop their school. Lindahl (2011) further argues that “understanding the constructs of school climate and culture by assessing them carefully, and then by using these assessments to guide the planning process, leaders can vastly improve the probability of successful school improvement” (p. 24). Accordingly, the climate of each school can be seen as intertwined with school improvement.

Summary

Improving schools, envisioning change, and planning to enact and see that change in schools, is a complex and important process. School improvement as part of
organizational change is something that takes time, reflection, stakeholder input and, when necessary, reconfiguring to meet the needs of the organization. Respecting the views of all stakeholders, providing relevant professional learning, and leadership mindset that embraces inquiry and growth for all, adults and students alike, are the essential components of a school culture that can enact effective change (Carpenter, 2015; Isernhagen, 2012; Knight, 2011). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, we will look at stakeholder groups as both those who have a defined role in the school, such as faculty, staff and administration, as well as outside stakeholders, such as parents, who are responsible for the wellbeing of the students. In this study, each of these four groups will have input into the school improvement process. As the research has shown, it is better to accomplish this task with the input of stakeholders. School leaders need to keep relationship building with stakeholders based on trust at the forefront of what is practiced. Furthermore, using the Appreciative Inquiry process has the potential of fostering a positive school climate which in turn can help with student academic gains and employee job satisfaction. Bringing stakeholders together to accomplish organizational change can help the school and community move forward towards school improvement, but more importantly, meet the needs of the students for them to show academic success.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Action research was chosen for this study because the nature of the research requires groups of people to propose interventions within a school in order to show improvement. According to Craig (2009), “action research is a common methodology employed for improving conditions and practice in practitioner-based environments such as schools” (p. 3). School improvement is a process that is revised continually throughout the year to determine how to best achieve the goals put forth by the school. Action research has several different models that may be used to approach the process of ongoing problem resolution. The specific form of action research that will be used in this study is Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based approach to action research for problem solving and organizational change and growth. This model follows a 5-D Cycle—Define, Discover, Dream, Design, and Deploy. It is based on the premise that organizations grow and change in the direction of what they study (Watkins et al., 2011). It is the desire of the administrative team at Logan Elementary School to improve the school by building upon its already established strengths to make change. Therefore, the Appreciative Inquiry action research method appropriately fits the needs of this study.

The study explored (a) if the Appreciative Inquiry process helped lead to a school improvement plan that meets the Virginia Department of Education’s School
Improvement Plan guidelines, and (b) if the participants perceived that the Appreciative Inquiry process led to an improved school climate at Logan Elementary School. The Appreciative Inquiry process followed a strengths-based approach to school improvement at Logan Elementary School where only a deficit, or problem-centered, approach to school improvement had been used in the past. By using a strengths-based approach to school improvement, the issues in the school were addressed by building upon what the school already does well, rather than examining what is not done well and then trying to find a way to overcome the problem.

**Description of the Intervention**

Appreciative Inquiry is grounded in Social Constructivist theory within the constructivist paradigm. Social Constructivist theory argues that “our world is shaped by the many dialogues we have with each other where we both selectively make sense of our past and present experiences and create shared images of what we anticipate in the future” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 41). Social Constructivist theory further states that the “process puts aside the importance of preconceived outcomes and focuses on the stakeholders as your evaluation partners, whom you respect and who open up to you” (Mertens & Wilson, 2012, p. 133). This study explored the improvement plan input given by the stakeholders of the school of this study to help develop a school improvement plan and the stakeholder perceptions of the process that have emerged from the questions asked throughout the Appreciative Inquiry process. The thoughts and ideas of the stakeholders were examined by the administrative team and the stakeholders to understand what practices, processes, and strategies should be deployed for Logan Elementary School to achieve its goals of improvement.
Appreciative Inquiry was first conceived by David Cooperrider in the early 1980s as a way to positively affect institutional change by “choosing positive inquiry because it leads to positive images that, in turn, create a positive future” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 42). Often, schools look at school improvement issues as identifying problems, or deficits, that need to be resolved, and once these deficits are overcome the school will return to a positive better functioning organization. Appreciative Inquiry asserts that “by focusing on the deficit, we simply create more images of deficit and potentially overwhelm the system with images of what is wrong” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 16).

Appreciative Inquiry uses the power of the collective positive images of the organization brought forth by the stakeholders driving the potential vision of the future and positive change of the organization. According to Tschannen-Moran and Tschannen-Moran (2011), “Appreciative Inquiry encourages organizations to identify strengths and imagine possibilities to outgrow problems and realize visions” (p. 422). Through this Appreciative Inquiry process, Logan Elementary School has the potential to realize their collective strengths, imagine their ideal selves and take steps to improve the school.

The Appreciative Inquiry process has several models that can be used in the strengths-based approach to problem resolution. For this study, we will be using the Appreciative Inquiry 5-D model of Define, Discover, Dream, Design and Deploy (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). In the 5-D model, each stage is meant to help an institution reveal and then actualize the positive elements already occurring that make the organization positively unique and functioning at its best. Furthermore, the 5-D model is designed to have participants actively process information at each stage to enlighten the actions taken in the next stage. The Appreciative Inquiry process then takes those factors
that make the organization its best and applies these elements to different parts of the organization. For the purpose of this study, we focused on the Define, Discover, Dream, and Design stages of the 5-D model. The Deploy stage of the process was not included in this study. Although the Deploy stage will continue throughout the school year, this formal study will end before this action research cycle is completed. Because one of the main purposes of this study was to determine if the Appreciative Inquiry process helped lead to developing a school improvement plan, the study timeline was constrained to conclude at the end of September because the school improvement plan for Logan Elementary School was due to the Superintendent by the beginning of October. Through these first four stages, the administrative team took the input provided by the stakeholders and organized how to best deploy the gathered information to make these strengths-based interventions come to fruition within the school.

**Define.** In the Define Stage, a small group of stakeholders, the Advisory Group, gathered to determine the areas of inquiry for the larger group. This action research team included a cross-section of all the intended stakeholders for this study that focused the direction of the Appreciative Inquiry process. This process had members of the action research team first taking part in paired interviews in which they responded to open-ended questions about their favorite memories of Logan Elementary School. The topics of these questions included: what they valued the most about themselves and their work at Logan Elementary School, when they felt most alive and engaged at Logan Elementary School, who was there making the experience more positive, and what wishes they had for the school moving forward (Appendix A). The participants then gathered in two small groups of six to eight people, introduced their interview partners to the group and
summarized their partner’s interview responses. Once all the stories were shared with the group, the group participants captured the common themes they heard across the stories shared on chart paper and posted the chart paper on the wall for everyone to see. Each small group had one person present their common themes to the large group.

Participants from the entire group were given three dot stickers to place next to any of the common themes from both groups’ presentations that they felt most resonated with their aspirations for Logan Elementary School. After the stickers were placed on the posters, the participants were asked to notice and discuss what themes had the most dot stickers. They were asked to determine which themes held the most positive energy to serve as a focus for the other stakeholder groups when going through the Appreciative Inquiry process. Three themes were identified and became the basis for the inquiry for the larger stakeholder groups in the next phase. These were:

- Relationships with parents and community
- Student engagement and learning opportunities
- Positivity with kids, among the staff, as it applied to discipline, its outlook for the school and relationships in general.

**Discover.** The Discover stage of this study allowed a larger group of identified stakeholders of Logan Elementary School to collectively come to understand what they felt was the best of what was and has been at Logan Elementary School in the three specific areas of inquiry (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010). Parents, faculty and staff all engaged in the Discover Stage. This stage was accomplished by the parent, faculty, and staff stakeholders coming together and sharing their favorite stories or memories of Logan Elementary School with each other in the areas of inquiry identified during the
Define stage as well as their hopes for the school going forward. It is during these sessions that stakeholders are meant to discover the “life giving properties that are present in those exceptional moments when the organization is performing optimally and the structures, dynamics and other associated conditions that allow those life-giving properties to flourish” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 37).

The Discover stage of this study included four sessions. The first three were used to gather information from the parent stakeholder groups about what they valued most about the school and their ideas for school improvement as it pertains to the focus questions established by those stakeholders in the Define Stage of the Appreciative inquiry process. Prior to the start of this stage, an invitation letter and phone blast communication were sent to the parents asking for them to participate in the Appreciative Inquiry process. The fourth session in the Discover stage took place during the pre-service professional development time two weeks before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year with the faculty, staff and administration of Logan Elementary School. All interviews were conducted in person at Logan Elementary School in the school cafeteria. All stakeholder groups, including the faculty and staff stakeholder group, were provided a meal and a raffle for a $25.00 Target card.

Stakeholder participants in this study started in paired interviews with one another. They were invited to partner with another person in the group that they did not know well or would like to know better. I, acting as the facilitator of this Appreciative Inquiry process, then discussed what we were about to do, with information about Appreciative Inquiry, the basis and power of strengths-based approach to school improvement, and my role as co-participant in the activity. I also discussed the
importance of keeping conversations positive and the power of positive words. As the facilitator, I modeled what an appropriate response would be to an Appreciative Inquiry question where your partner began to focus on a negative aspect they felt was wrong with the school by asking them to,

    tell me how you would like it to be if this was no longer an issue. Or, if you feel that you have never experienced something positive like this at Logan Elementary, can you tell me about a time and place where you did observe it and how it made you feel.

I emphasized that each person’s story should be a narrative that included them to make the story uniquely theirs, and if the story didn’t involve them, it should nevertheless invoke positive feelings (See Appendix B, Directions for the Discover Stage).

Participants then engaged in paired interviews which took place during this first part of the session. The interviews consisted of stakeholders introducing themselves to each other and then following the interview protocol questionnaire which asked them to share a favorite story or memory of Logan Elementary School in each of the three areas of inquiry, as well as their wishes for what the school could be (See Appendix C, Logan Elementary School Interview Protocol). After both people in the dyad went through the interview protocol questionnaire and were finished sharing their answers with each other, each pair found two more pairs to form a small group of six to eight people. Each person introduced their dyad partner to the group and shared their partner’s interview protocol responses. As the newly formed small group listened to each of the stories and the wishes, each group was invited to identify three to five themes from what was shared with the group.
After all the individual stories were shared with the group and the three to five common themes were identified, participants were asked to record the themes by writing them on chart paper. The groups posted their charts in a designated area on the wall in the room, and a spokesperson from the group briefly described the themes their small group saw as common to each other’s answers from the interview protocol to the whole group. Each stakeholder received three dot stickers and five minutes to place a dot sticker next to the themes that they individually felt most resonated with them about Logan Elementary existing at its best.

Once the participants returned to their seats, the group as a whole was then asked what they noticed and wondered about the dot stickers on the chart paper. It was from this conversation with the stakeholders that the entire group that gathered at each session determined as a collective whole what they felt were the most valued life-giving themes from the positive stories shared by the stakeholders. From each of the stakeholder sessions, three to four common themes emerged as the positive properties and exceptional moments that make Logan Elementary School work at its best. Since there were more than one theme being chosen at each session, the group was able to have discussion and choice over more than one example that emerged from the discussion that represented how the group felt about their decision on what major themes emerged. This process was the same for all stakeholder groups. For the three family stakeholder groups, this ended the session and the stakeholders ate and the gift card was raffled. For the faculty and staff stakeholder group, the dot exercise concluded the Discover Stage and they then moved into the Dream Stage.
During the Discover stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process for the faculty stakeholder group, the small group common themes that emerged from the interviews and the share out sessions were placed on the wall. Then, the major themes as discussed in the three parent stakeholder group sessions were also displayed and presented to the faculty stakeholder group. The faculty stakeholder group then used their dot stickers to identify the themes from any of the sessions that they felt resonated with them as to what Logan Elementary does or looks like when it is at its best. The faculty group then were asked to notice and wonder what the dot stickers represented as the most common themes. From this, the faculty stakeholder group determined what major themes from all the information gathered in the four sessions of stakeholder input were to be used going forward through the rest of the Appreciative Inquiry process. This concluded the Discover stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process. For a complete listing of the themes that emerged from all four sessions of the Discover Phase, see Appendix D.

**Dream.** The faculty, staff and administration at Logan Elementary School then moved into the Dream and Design Stages of this study on the same day as they engaged in the Discover stage.

In the Dream Stage, stakeholders, “create shared images of what their organization would look like if those exceptional moments and life-giving properties became the norm, rather than the exception” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 36). Individual tables or areas of the room were designated for each of the five major themes. The stakeholders were asked to move to the theme that held the most energy for them, or that they identified the most with and that they would like to work on going forward through this process (Appendix E). If there were substantially more people at one theme than
another, I, as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, asked the group if some were willing to work on a subset of the theme that they came up with, or if they would like to move to another theme. If there was a group with two or three people, they were asked if they were comfortable working in a small group or I gave them the option to disburse and join another group. The key component of this stage and the entire Appreciative Inquiry process was for the individuals to decide what they wanted to work on or be a part of instead of being told what to do. Part of the power of the Appreciative Inquiry process is that the individual participants have choice into the process so that they potentially have more buy in to the process because they become the decision makers.

As the groups formed, each person was asked to share what inspired them to choose this theme. At their tables, each group had materials and were asked to create a visual image, a song, or a skit that represented their theme, if it were to be fully realized at Logan Elementary. These materials included chart paper, markers and colored pencils. The groups were given 40 minutes to complete their task of choice. The groups shared their new creative representation to the larger group.

In addition to the creative representations, the groups were also asked to articulate a bold claim for their group in the form of a provocative proposition that, “proposes the group’s ideal for the opportunity area, grounded in what works, written in the present tense in the affirmative using vivid positive imagery, stretches beyond the norm into more desired forms of interaction and constitutes the ideal” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 205). This provocative proposition, “elicits an ‘oh, wow’ response from the reader rather than a ‘ho-hum’ response” (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 218). The group provocative proposition can be viewed as a group vision statement. These provocative
propositions are, “written in the affirmative and expand the organization’s image of itself by presenting clear, compelling pictures of how things will be when the organization’s positive core is boldly alive in all of its strategies, processes, systems, decisions and collaborations” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 9). I, as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, gave an example of what a provocative proposition could look like. It was emphasized that each provocative proposition was unique and the example given was only one example of the possibilities that these bold statements could take on or look like (Appendix E).

It is during this stage that stakeholders should think of possibilities beyond what has happened in the past to make Logan Elementary School its best self. This stage should, “align around creative images of the organization’s most positive potentials and strategic opportunities innovative strategic visions and elevated sense of purpose” (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2010, p. 8).

The result of the Dream stage was the participants producing shared images of how the school can be seen by everyone when it is at its best so that the participants get an idea of what it looks and feels like when they interact with the best of Logan Elementary school in mind. These products then served as a basis of what Logan Elementary School is expected to look and act like with internal and external stakeholders, especially when it comes to the major themes that the group identified that will help Logan Elementary to be its best. Once the groups created their proactive propositions, they then shared their provocative propositions with the entire group. This concluded the Dream Stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process.
Design. The fourth Stage of the 5-D model, and the final one accomplished during this study, was the Design Stage. The Design stage incorporated information cultivated during the Discovery and Dream stages including the identification of what the school was doing best, and the identification of a path forward to continued improvement. In this stage, the faculty and staff considered all the information discovered from the Define, Discover, and Dream stages and worked in design teams to develop plans to move the school in the direction of their collective dreams. During the Design stage, the faculty and staff concentrated on the images and provocative propositions articulated in the Dream stage and explored how to bring these aspirations to fruition. The Design Stage of this study was intended to help Logan Elementary School begin to put into action the what, who and how of implementing the positive themes of life-giving forces of the school brought forth in the Discover and Dream Stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process. After sharing of the creative presentation and provocative propositions with the entire group, each design team moved on to brainstorming and developing potential strategies to use the provocative propositions and strengths-based approaches to be implemented within their opportunity areas to bring their dreams to life (Appendix F). This was done by the group taking part in the Individual Action Approach, or the Requests, Offer and Commitments Approach (Watkins et al., 2011). This approach allowed each group member to state a simple commitment, make an offer, or articulate a request.

*Simple commitments* describe actions that can be easily taken, typically within one or two weeks, and are within existing authority and resources available to the person making the commitment.
Offers are a form of a “gift.” Offers can be made in response to a request. Offers can come in any shape, or form—the more specific the better.

Requests are focused on what one person, or group needs from another person, or group. (Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011, p. 241).

Once these commitments, offers, and requests were finalized in relationship to opportunity areas the groups were working in to bring their life-giving dreams to reality, each group shared with the collective whole how they planned to accomplish their goal. See Appendix G for the complete listing of Provocative Positions/Possibility Statements, Commitments, Offers and Requests. Once this was completed, the Design Stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process was completed.

**Deploy.** The fifth stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process, the Deploy Stage, will take place after the conclusion on this dissertation study. It will be carried out throughout the 2019-2020 school year by the Design Teams of faculty and staff formed at the end of the Discover stage of the process. Time will be provided during monthly faculty meetings for planning, executing, and reporting on the designs developed. In keeping with the timeline of providing a school improvement plan to the superintendent of Wootten County Schools by the beginning of October, the Deploy Stage was not included in this study.

**Role of the Researcher**

For this study, my role was as co-participant, facilitator of the sessions, and observer. I was guided by an experienced Appreciative Inquiry practitioner. It was important for me to be continually aware of the different roles that I played and the interactions I had with stakeholders within this study. At the Define stage and during the
four sessions in the Discover stage, as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, I greeted the stakeholder participants, introduced and explained the Appreciative Inquiry process, answered any questions they had during the sessions and helped move the conversations and projects along during the sessions. For example, as co-participant while conducting the dyad interview process with my partner I, as facilitator, was also observing the room so that when people seemed to be finishing their interviews I reminded them of the instructions that I gave prior to starting the dyad interviews that once they were finished, to gather in dyad groups of six to eight people to start the small group part of the sessions. As facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, I elicited the help of those members from the action research team in the Define stage to assist me with the four Discover stage sessions. I facilitated the discussion of stories of life-giving forces, located common themes for further inquiry, then helped create shared images for a preferred future and found innovating ways to create that future.

As the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, I addressed bias first by being forthcoming with the stakeholders about my role and how I expected the process to unfold before we began the Appreciative Inquiry process. I recognized that, as the principal of the school, I am in a position of formal authority over the faculty and staff participants, and that they might therefore be fearful of saying things that they perceived to be counter to my point of view. As the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, I explicitly encouraged candor and assured them that there will be no negative repercussions based on what they said or did as part of the process. As for the parents, they might have feared negative repercussions for their child if they said things that are perceived to be critical of the school by me, as the principal of Logan Elementary school,
or by others. Here too, I, as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, encouraged candor and offered assurances that no harm would come to them or their child. I provided all participants with the name and contact information of my dissertation advisor and the chair of the William & Mary Education Institutional Review Committee and encouraged them to contact either of these resources for recourse if they had concerns about any aspect of the study.

When facilitating the Appreciative Inquiry process, I introduced the Appreciative Inquiry process, explicitly explained how the process is intended for the entire group to produce the outcome of the major themes we collectively felt are best qualities of Logan Elementary and not just the opinion of a single person, regardless of their position, or title at the school. Furthermore, I explained to the group how the group decisions would dictate where the discussions went during the Discover, Dream and Design stages of the stakeholder sessions with the proviso that the decisions that they made throughout the process were feasible and within the realm of what could be done. As a facilitator, I modeled how the stakeholders make any decisions about how to move forward in the process rather than make any unilateral decision as the person in charge as either the facilitator or my role as principal. Furthermore, as the principal and their boss, I reassured those stakeholders who might have seen a perceived positionality conflict, that their thoughts and opinions expressed were welcomed and would in no way be held against them. This was accomplished in several ways and explicitly communicated to all the stakeholders. For example, I explained that the ideas that were put forth were done by the group rather than having individuals take responsibility for ideas. The names of the stakeholder participants were not recorded, nor were the names of any faculty and staff
stakeholder participants who were unable or unwilling to be part of the Appreciative Inquiry process recorded. At the outset of the group discussions, group norms were thoroughly explained. For example, all participants had an equal voice in the discussion, each member focused on the positive rather than the negative and all members of the group acknowledged the rights of each member of the group to express how they felt without negative comment, nor judgment. The dyad interview discussions were not recorded. As facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry process, I returned to the group norms along the continuum of the process with the stakeholders to check for adherence to the established group norms guidelines. When voting for what they felt are the themes that most spoke to them as stakeholders of Logan Elementary School, their vote was displayed with a dot sticker that protected their anonymity.

**Participants**

The participants for this action research study were specifically targeted stakeholders of Logan Elementary School. These stakeholders included the parents of students and the faculty and staff of Logan Elementary School. Students of Logan Elementary, policymakers such as the school board and the board of supervisors, the business owners, and the taxpayers of Wootten County are also stakeholders, but they were not directly involved in this study. All participants were informed prior to the stakeholder sessions that the information gathered was used as part of the school improvement process as well as for the purpose of gathering information for this dissertation study.

**Action Research Team.** There were 12 participants in this group. Included in this group were three teachers; two instructional aids, one of whom also is a bus driver for the
school, and another who acts as a reading interventionist; the school counselor; the school secretary; the school custodian; the PTO president; the District Coordinator of Special Education; and the school administrators. The head of food service was invited to join the group but ultimately was not able to participate. Of the 12 participants in this group, six were Wootten County residents and three had children or grandchildren that attended Logan Elementary School. The length of experience at Logan Elementary School of the participants varied from 2-24 years.

**Parents.** Parent stakeholders were invited to participate in this study through a letter sent to their homes and emails as well as multiple phone calls to their homes at least two weeks prior to the date of the first session. They were invited to participate in one of three sessions to take place over the summer on three separate days at three different times at Logan Elementary School. There was a morning, an afternoon and an evening session offered so that parents with various schedules could be accommodated. All parents were invited to participate and they were notified that participation was strictly voluntary and that participation, or non-participation, would have no effect on them or their children. At each of these sessions childcare was provided so the stakeholders were able to participate without distraction. A meal, either breakfast, lunch, or dinner depending on the session in which the participants choose to take part, was provided to the parent stakeholders and their children if they need to bring them. Finally, a door prize of a $25.00 Target gift card was offered and randomly distributed through a raffle format at the end of each session. This raffle was also be advertised to garner interest in the event. The parental stakeholder group focused on the Discover Stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process. There were three parent stakeholder groups held in July. Two were held
on different Tuesdays at 12:00 pm and 6:00 pm respectfully and one was held at 9:00 am on a Wednesday. There were 23 parents in total who chose to participate in the three Appreciative Inquiry sessions. The participants were 20 females and three males; 12 participants were Black, eight were White and three were Native American. The participants consisted of 21 parents and two grandparents.

**Faculty and staff.** The second group was the faculty and staff stakeholder group which consisted of the teachers, and staff, all non-teacher employees, of Logan Elementary School. This included teachers, instructional aides, cafeteria workers, custodians, bus drivers, secretaries, the nurse and the school administration. The Faculty and Staff stakeholders consisted of 36 people, of whom three were male and 33 were female. Seven Instructional Aids, all of whom were female, participated and the lone school counselor, who was female, participated in the Appreciative Inquiry process. Their input was gathered through paired interviews and reported out using the Appreciative Inquiry guidelines on one specific day during the pre-service weeks before the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year and provided input into the Discover, Dream, and Design Stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process. They also received meals and a chance to win a $25.00 gift card to Target through a raffle format for their participation in this study. The faculty and staff stakeholder group focused on the Discover, Dream and Design stages of this Appreciative Inquiry study.

All of the cafeteria workers, custodians, and bus drivers were invited to participate in the Appreciative Inquiry process. However, due to a scheduling conflict with other professional development being held in the district for these employees at the same time as the Appreciative Inquiry process, they were not able to attend.
Data Sources

School improvement plan. The plans created by the design teams from the different major positive themes developed by the stakeholders during the Design stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process were used to answer the first research question. The outcome of the Appreciative Inquiry process was to help the administration develop areas within the overall school improvement plan to make the school function in a more positive way and not necessarily to create a school improvement plan in its entirety.

Reflection survey. A reflection survey was given to both the parent stakeholder groups and the Logan Elementary School employee stakeholder group to gauge their perceptions on the Appreciative Inquiry process and how it may have contributed to a positive school climate. The survey (Appendix H) was designed with the eight principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Watkins et al., 2011) as the basis of the prompts asked of the participants. This was done to judge whether the Appreciative Inquiry process was viewed as an influential factor in contributing to a positive school climate while at the same time keeping to the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. There were 12 prompts on the survey with four potential answers to each prompt. The responses to each prompt concerning the participants’ perceptions about the Appreciative Inquiry process were: 0-Not at All; 1-A Little Bit; 2-Some; 3-A Great Deal. Furthermore, there was an open-ended prompt at the end of the survey to get qualitative data on the Appreciative Inquiry process. The open-ended prompt was as follows: How did the Appreciative Inquiry process change your perspective about this school? Additionally, the faculty and staff stakeholder group was given the survey at the conclusion of the Discover, Dream and
Design Stage and again a month after the Appreciative Inquiry process was completed to gauge the opinion of the faculty and staff stakeholder group on how well the Appreciative Inquiry process was received and working within the school one month after the process was completed.

**Data Collection**

**School improvement plan.** A compilation of the identified themes from each of the parent stakeholder sessions was gathered as written on the chart paper, as well as a record of how many dots each theme garnered, so as to help the faculty and staff stakeholder group make decisions about next steps in the Dream and Design stages. These data were also collected during the faculty and staff stakeholder Discover sessions. At the end of the Design stage, all groups were asked to turn in the provocative proposition statements as well as the list of commitments, offers, and requests. The result of the information gathered from the different groups that the design teams created around the major common themes that emerged of the positive properties and exceptional moments that make Logan Elementary School work at its best was then compared to the guidelines of the Virginia Department of Education for School Improvement to determine which specific areas were addressed from what was created by the design teams. This information was then incorporated into the overall school improvement plan to help guide the school throughout the school year.

**Reflection survey.** The reflection survey was distributed to the parent stakeholders at the end of the Discover Stage. I did this so that we could capture how they were feeling as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry Discovery stage process. Furthermore, it would have been difficult to obtain feedback later from the parent
stakeholders due to the need for anonymity for the study. The survey for the faculty and staff stakeholder group was given both at the end of the appreciative inquiry summit and at the end of September. It was administered via paper and pencil.

**Data Analysis**

Table 2 describes the goals of the study, the Action Research Questions, and the data sources and analysis that was used to evaluate the action research questions.

Table 2

*Action Research Questions, Data Sources, and Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: To what extent did the Appreciative Inquiry process at Logan Elementary School help lead to a school improvement plan that meets the Virginia Department of Education School Improvement Plan requirements?</td>
<td>School improvement plan initiatives developed by stakeholders during the Appreciative Inquiry process</td>
<td>Mean scores of the action plan for school improvement developed by the stakeholders in comparison of the guidelines of the Virginia Department of Education for school improvement (mean score for each plan, mean score for each item across plans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: To what extent did the participants perceive the Appreciative Inquiry process to contribute toward a positive school climate?</td>
<td>Survey data completed by the stakeholders after going through the Appreciative Inquiry process</td>
<td>Mean scores of the survey findings completed by the stakeholder participants after the Appreciative Inquiry process (grand mean, median, mode and range; overall mean, median, mode and range by question, for each stakeholder group)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School improvement plans.** The plans developed by each Design Team were assessed separately as well as collectively. Each plan was given a score for how many of the criteria are met, ranging from 0-3. These plans were assessed using a template to determine the degree to which they met the criteria as put forth by the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) School Improvement Planning Requirements
(Appendix I aligns with the template required by the VDOE). The template provided by VDOE (Appendix J) is comprehensive of what components schools would have to show in a variety of areas to demonstrate to the state and their community that they were taking steps to improve their school. These school improvement areas consist of the following: description of their school improvement process, documentation of student achievement scores, schedule of times students are receiving instruction, remediation and intervention strategies, staff development needs, parent help, the need for flexibility and waivers and proof of spending practices. In order to answer the first research question, I developed a review template (Appendix I) based on a subset of the criteria provided by the VDOE (Appendix J). Since Logan Elementary School is located in Virginia, I used the VDOE’s School Improvement Planning: Schools Accredited with Warning, or Provisionally Accredited – Graduation rate School Improvement Plan Requirements. I used the VDOE School Improvement Plan requirements for schools accredited with warning or provisionally accredited even though Logan Elementary is fully accredited. This was done because, according to VDOE, there currently are no other school improvement criteria, requirements, or guidelines provided by the VDOE for schools that are fully accredited. VDOE lists nine requirements for creating a School Improvement Plan. For the purposes of this study, I looked at these nine requirements that effect Logan Elementary School.

The specific components assessed were:

- Intervention strategies designed to prevent further declines in student performance
- Staff development needed
• Strategies to involve and assist parents in raising their child’s academic performance

• A description of how the school will meet the provisional accreditation benchmarks, or the requirements to be fully accredited, for each of the years covered by the plan

• Specific measures for achieving and documenting student academic improvement

• The amount of time in the school day devoted to instruction in the core academic areas

• Instructional practices designed to remediate students who have not been successful on SOL tests

• The need for flexibility or waivers to state or local regulations to meet the objectives of the plan

• A description of the manner in which local, state, and federal funds are used to support the implementation of the components of this plan

The response scale was on a scale from 0-3, with the possible responses as the following: Not at All; A Little Bit; Some; Fully. The most total points any plan can get is twenty-seven as it relates to each of the nine specific criteria of this study as it is compared to the VDOE’s School Improvement Planning Requirements.

**Reflection survey.** The mean, median, mode and range scores for each item were calculated and reported in chapter 4. The mean, median, mode and range for the two main stakeholder groups, parent stakeholder groups, and faculty and staff stakeholder groups were also reported separately.
Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions, Ethical Considerations

**Delimitations.** This study was delimited to only one small, rural elementary school. As an action research study, the use of Appreciative Inquiry to address school improvement is a delimitation since I chose not to use any other type of action research for this study. The study has specifically targeted two stakeholder groups for this study and intentionally left other stakeholder groups out. There were three parent stakeholder sessions and one faculty and staff session during this study. Furthermore, the three parent stakeholder groups were only participating in the Discover Stage of the study and not included in the Dream and Design Stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The action research process will continue throughout the 2019-20 school year as the Design Teams enact their plans in the Deploy Stage, but this was not part of the dissertation study. Time constraints were also a delimitation in having the parental stakeholder group participation to the Discover stage, because to complete the Dream and Design stages of the Appreciative Inquiry process would have required parents to commit to over seven hours on one day to the process, which seemed unrealistic in this first round of action research. Due to time as well as space constraints within Logan Elementary School, the parent stakeholder groups met separately from the faculty and staff stakeholder groups.

**Limitations.** There was no control over the number of parent stakeholders from the community that participated in this study since it was done on a voluntary basis. Since this study took place in the summer, there was no control over the travel plans or weather conditions that might have kept participants from attending the sessions. There may be factors beyond the control of this study, or the facilitator which prevented those invited to
participate in the faculty and staff portion of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The reactions of the faculty and staff to this new approach to school improvement were also not under my control.

Assumptions. It was assumed that all stakeholders were participating because they wished to see Logan Elementary School improve. It was assumed that all participants followed the rules and standards of Appreciative Inquiry during this process and used the sessions as a strengths-based opportunity for school improvement.

Ethical Considerations

- I gained the William and Mary Institutional Review Board approval when dealing with human subjects prior to conducting the analysis of the data for this study.

- The name of the school and school district was changed to protect the identity of the institutions and participants. Permission was sought and given prior to the launch of this study by the school district Superintendent.

- The participants in the sessions were assured that their names and ideas were not to be given nor shared with anyone and all information remained confidential. All information gathered during the sessions in the Appreciative Inquiry process will be destroyed within one year.

- My role was that of co-participant. I discussed with each stakeholder group how I intend to overcome my bias by being actively involved with the group with which I was working and not traveling from group to group to examine what they were doing or how they were progressing. Since the analysis of the data was done by the group, my bias was diminished to one person’s opinion.
in a group of many. There were times when I gave examples to the groups
during the sessions to help facilitate conversation and help move the process
along. However, after the directions for each stage were given, I immediately
moved back to my group to participate as a group member and not leader.

- There may have been some who were uncomfortable with positionality of me
  as their boss or child’s principal. However, I addressed this at the beginning of
each session by discussing how the entire Appreciative Inquiry process is
based on group decisions and elicits several ideas from the group where no
one idea or answer is absolute. As long as the process of school improvement
is seen through a strengths-based lens, there can be no wrong answers or
ideas. There may have been some ideas that were not feasible, but that was
resolved through the process of making commitments and requests.
Chapter 4

Results

Results of the Appreciative Inquiry

There were a variety of people who participated in the action research team, as well as the parent and faculty and staff Appreciative Inquiry groups. The action research team conducted the Define stage and helped to facilitate the Discover and the Design phases. There were three parent stakeholder groups, with a total of 23 participants. The faculty and staff group consisted of 35 participants. The following information details the findings from those groups that ultimately led to forming of design groups to put steps into place to help Logan Elementary school perform at its best.

Action research team findings in the define stage. The first stakeholder group that participated in the Appreciative Inquiry process was the action research team. The 12 participants in the action research team were split into two groups of six people each. The major themes the groups themselves decided on and named which emerged from the two groups were as follows. From Group A, the themes were Experiences and Opportunities; Relationships with Parents and Community; Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes; Staff Morale and Relationships with each other; Positivity – kids, each other (staff), discipline, outlook, relationships in general. From Group B, the themes were Community – involvement, interactions, connections; Students – leadership, ownership, knowledge, importance; Commitment; Perseverance and Relationships.
The Action Research Team viewed the results the results of what the two groups shared and decided that the major themes that would guide this Appreciative Inquiry would be:

- Relationships with parents and community
- Student engagement and learning opportunities
- Positivity with kids, among the staff, as it applied to discipline, its outlook for the school and relationships in general.

This information was used to develop the Logan Elementary School Interview Protocol used in the Discover Stage (Appendix C).

**Parent stakeholder group findings.** The major themes generated during the Discover Stage during the 3 sessions with parents are as shown in Table 3.
Table 3

Major Themes Generated During the Discover Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Name</th>
<th>Themes Generated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent Stakeholder 1</td>
<td>1. Field trip opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Parent involvement and communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Community events/parent nights/stem&amp; literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Clubs/Athletics/Musical performances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Stakeholder 2</td>
<td>1. Engagement – Activities (Turkey Trot, Grandparents Day), Parent Academy’s (Art Night), Academics Highlights (combine fun with academics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Communication with Stakeholders - Student shout outs, award ceremonies, adult involvement, participation, Social media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Strong relationships with all stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Stakeholder 3</td>
<td>1. After School Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Communication – Dojo, Newsletters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Enrichment Programs – advanced programs/field trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. After School Events – PTO – Trunk or Treat, Turkey Trot, Grandparents Day, Math/Literacy Night</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. PTO = Parent Teacher Organization

These results were shared with the Faculty and Staff stakeholder group after they reported the themes that had emerged from their small group discussions of the responses to the dyad interviews in the Discover Stage. See Appendix D for complete results of each stakeholder group major themes generated as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry Discover Stage.

The faculty and staff then used dot stickers to vote on all of the themes presented both from the faculty and staff stakeholder groups as well as the three parent stakeholder groups. All the participants were asked to look at which themes others had placed the dot stickers on and notice and wonder what the implication of different themes having greater or fewer dot stickers. As a result of the group discussions, after the noticing and
wondering activity on what the voting and dot stickers showed the faculty and staff stakeholder groups, the following major themes were decided on by group consensus to move forward with the Dream and Design Stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process:

1. Community Events
2. Extended Engagement Opportunities for Students – Clubs and Field Trips
3. Hands on Learning – STEAM & Other
4. Communication
5. Sustain Positive Groove

**Dream Stage provocative propositions/possibility statements.** Each of these design teams had provocative propositions/possibility statements emerge from their team discussions. These provocative propositions/possibility statements gave each design team a focus on which each team was determined to keep in the forefront of what their teams were striving to achieve. A list of the provocative propositions/possibility statements created by the design teams can be found in Table 4.
Table 4

*Design Teams Provocative Propositions / Possibility Statement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design Team</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>We the staff at LES are committed to collaborating and engaging community stakeholders in a cooperative effort to extend and enrich our student’s learning and academic experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Engagement</td>
<td>We give our students extended and engaging opportunities so that they are discovering and learning who they are and what their personal interests are to become lifelong learners in our ever-changing global society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for Children</td>
<td>LES uses hands on learning to promote and enhance social and emotional skills, cognitive abilities, and physical movement; we utilize these skills through collaboration, problem solving, and creating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands on Learning</td>
<td>We believe that the doors of LES are open to all of the community of Wootten County and beyond. We welcome the community to visit our school. We will provide easy access to information about our programs and services. We value communication with all our community stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>We the LES learning community are sustaining positivity and a sense of unity by ensuring everyone feels welcomed, valued and uplifted as individuals in our school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. LES = Logan Elementary School

The design team action steps required each of the design teams to develop commitments, offers and requests within their teams to make their shared vision of their team come into existence within Logan Elementary School. See the full plans developed by the design teams in Appendix G.

**Results of the Action Research Questions**

During the Appreciative Inquiry process, several common themes emerged in discussions among the stakeholder groups. These themes informed the action steps built by design teams to help Logan Elementary move forward using stakeholder beliefs of
what makes Logan an outstanding school. The design team action steps were then compared to VDOE’s School Improvement Requirements to determine which of the design team action steps met inclusion requirements for a school improvement plan, thereby answering Action Research Question 1. To answer Action Research Question 2, I analyzed the data gathered from stakeholders in the post Appreciative Inquiry survey to determine if the stakeholders felt that the climate of Logan Elementary School had improved as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process.

**Action Research Question 1**: To what extent did the Appreciative Inquiry process at Logan Elementary School help lead to a school improvement plan that meets the Virginia Department of Education School Improvement Plan requirements?

To answer this first question, all stakeholder groups in this study completed the Discover Stage of the Appreciative Inquiry process. The faculty and staff stakeholder group completed the Discover, Dream, and Design phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process for the design teams to create plans that would eventually help create part of a school improvement plan for Logan Elementary School. The five design themes created as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process were as follows:

1. Community Events
2. Extended Engagement Opportunities for Students – Clubs and Field Trips
3. Hands on Learning – STEAM & Other
4. Communication
5. Sustain Positive Groove

These themes and the resulting action plans were then measured against the component requirements set forth by the VDOE for school improvement plans for schools.
Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited using the School Improvement Plan Rating Template (Appendix I). The VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited has nine components that are required in a school improvement plan (Appendix J). This template had four categories (Not at all, A little bit, Some, Fully) with which to rate whether or not the design teams answered any of the criteria in the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited. A score of Not at all would mean the action plans growing out of this Appreciative Inquiry study had no areas related to this criterion of the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited guidelines. A score of A little bit would indicate that there were areas of the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited that slightly or barely related the criteria. A score of Some addressed some, but not all, of the criteria of the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited. A score of Fully completely addressed a component of VDOE’s school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited.

Two of the five design team themes had none of the VDOE component requirements for school improvement plan. Those design teams were the Communication and the Sustain Positive Groove design teams.

There were six components of the VDOE template that did not apply to any of the design team themes. Those areas were as follows:
• Component 1: A description of how the school will meet the provisional accreditation benchmarks, or the requirements to be Fully Accredited, for each of the years covered by the plan
• Component 2: Specific measures for achieving and documenting student academic improvement
• Component 3: The amount of time in the school day devoted to instruction in the core academic areas
• Component 6: Staff development needed
• Component 8: The need for flexibility or waivers to state or local regulations to meet the objectives of the plan
• Component 9: A description of the manner in which local, state, and federal funds are used to support the implementation of the components of this plan

Component 1 and 2 ask schools for specific measures and strategies that the school will take within the delivery of instruction to show student improvement. Component 3 and 6 ask about structure of academic time devoted to instruction and teacher improvement and Component 8 and 9 discuss the need to involve the state in help with either regulations or state funding. These areas, although important to the VDOE for developing a school improvement plan for under-performing schools, were not addressed by the Appreciative Inquiry process in this study.

There were three components out of nine that the VDOE School Improvement Plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited that design teams addressed either by partially or fully meeting the requirements for a school improvement plan. Component 4 asks for evidence of the following: Instructional practices designed to
remediate student who have not been successful on the SOL tests. Component 4 was addressed on the Some level of the School Improvement Plan Rating Template by the Hands-on Learning design team. The Hands-on Learning design team stated in their Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement that, “Logan Elementary School Uses hands-on learning to promote and enhance social and emotional skills, cognitive abilities and physical movement; we utilize these skills through collaboration, problem solving and creating.” Their Commitments, Offers, and Requests also stated that,

- **Commitments**: To practice interdisciplinary hands-on learning in our own environments; to promote and encourage those skills with our colleagues.
- **Offers**: To share ideas and materials.
- **Requests**: Materials through Communication Group and Extended Opportunities. Promote a STEAM club for the students through Extended Opportunities Group.

These instructional practices that the Hands-on Learning design team created as the guiding principles of their team is how answer Component 4 was answered Some on the School Improvement Rating Template.

The following two Component asked in the VDOE School Improvement Plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited were addressed, at least in part, by the design teams:

- Component 5: Intervention strategies designed to prevent further declines in student performance
- Component 7: Strategies to involve and assist parents in raising their child’s academic performance
Component 5 and Component 7 were addressed on the *Some or Fully* level of the School Improvement Plan Rating Template by the Community Events design team. Component 5, Intervention strategies designed to prevent further declines in student performance, can be seen to be answered in part by the Community Events design team who are trying to, “collaborating and engaging community stakeholders in a cooperative effort to extend and enrich our student’s learning and academic experiences.” Since the design team is committed to help improve student learning and academic experiences, it answers in part Component 5 because the design team is attempting to increase academic focused events (literacy night, numeracy night, study skills night, etc.) at the school with the community that would potentially address declines in student improvement. The evidence the Community Events design provided to answer this question can be found in their Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statements as well as in their Commitments, Offers and Requests. The Community Events design team state in their Provocative Propositions/Possibility Statement that, “We the staff at Logan Elementary School are committed to collaborating and engaging community stakeholders in a cooperative effort to extend and enrich our student’s learning and academic experiences.” They further go on to state through their Comments, Offers and Requests that,

- **Commitments:** To attend 1 community event per school year: Fair, Powwow, Church Events, Steak Feast.

- **Offers:** Cover or swap with another staff member; Babysit Parent Academies

- **Request:** Attendees from each of the groups for the community events.

These statements answer Component 5 on the “Some” level as related to the School Improvement Plan Rating Template.
The evidence of all the design teams answering any of the areas of the School Improvement Rating Template in the areas of *Fully* or by *Some* level can be found in the Provocative Propositions or Possibility Statements as well as in their Commitments, Offers and Requests found in Appendix G.

The results of this study showed that Action Research Question 1 was answered through the Appreciative Inquiry process, but not entirely. As a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process in this study, 3 of the 9 Components of the VDOE School Improvement Plan were answered. Additionally, the data showed that 2 of the 5 design teams created through the Appreciative Inquiry process answered 3 of the 9 required Components by the VDOE School Improvement Plan through their Provocative Propositions/Possibility Statements or through their Commitments, Offers and Requests which form the basis of their design teams and gives each design team their focus to help improve different areas of Logan Elementary School.

**Action Research Question 2: To what extent did the participants perceive the Appreciative Inquiry process to contribute toward a positive school climate?**

To answer Action Research Question 2, a survey was given at the end of each stakeholder session. The survey was then redistributed to the faculty and staff stakeholder group one month after the Appreciative Inquiry session was held to see how the faculty and stakeholder group felt the climate of the school was improving as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process. Therefore, the faculty and staff stakeholder groups took the survey twice. This is represented in the data results as Faculty and Staff Time 1 and Faculty and Staff Time 2. The data were gathered in accordance with Action Research Question 2 criteria that required an analysis of scores of the survey findings completed by
the stakeholder participants after the Appreciative Inquiry process, including the grand mean, median, mode and range; the mean, median, mode and range by question; and the mean, median, mode and range for each stakeholder group. The scale of the survey ranged from 1 to 4 with the following answer choices: 1-Not at All, 2-A Little Bit, 3-Some, and 4-A Great Deal. The overall results of the survey were very positive as is evident in what the data convey about the stakeholder individual group and over all mean score on the survey. Figure 1 shows the stakeholder overall mean results of the survey prompts.

Figure 1. Graph of stakeholder overall mean results of the survey prompts.

Prompt 6 in the survey asked, “I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school.” The data show that this question was the lowest respondent answer in all categories across the stakeholder group, although it was still above 3.0, and the difference was not statistically significant. This could be attributed to the fact the Appreciative Inquiry process had not been in place long enough for the stakeholders to see any difference. Recall that the survey was given to the parents at the conclusion of
their participation in the Discover phase. Similarly, the first faculty survey was given on the same day as the Appreciative Inquiry process for the faculty and staff.

Prompt 9 asked the stakeholders if the conversations during the Appreciative Inquiry process changed their perspective on the school. This was result also appeared lower than the other responses, although the difference was not statistically significant. Tables 5 and 6 show the statistical data for the full sample of all 12 prompts and the Statistics Comparing Parent Stakeholders with Faculty and Staff Time 1.
Table 5

Descriptive Statistics for the Full Sample ($N = 81$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$Mdn$</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel motivated to invest more of myself than I did before.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have noticed more positive aspects of this school than I did before.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’m feeling more positive about the school.</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I felt energized by the conversations I had during the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school.</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I’m looking forward to building on what we have accomplished so far.</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m encouraged that this process can continue to influence our work in this school.</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. These conversations have changed my perspective on the school.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I’m more hopeful about the future of our school.</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe we have the capacity to accomplish what we’ve planned.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6

**Descriptive Statistics Comparing Parent Stakeholders with Faculty and Staff Time 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Parents (n = 23)</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Time 1 (n = 35)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel motivated to invest more of myself than I did before.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have noticed more positive aspects of this school than I did before.</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’m feeling more positive about the school.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I felt energized by the conversations I had during the</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I’m looking forward to building on what we have accomplished so far.</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m encouraged that this process can continue to influence our work</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in this school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. These conversations have changed my perspective on the school.</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>.593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to improve our school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I’m more hopeful about the future of our school.</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe we have the capacity to accomplish what we’ve planned.</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An independent sample ANOVA comparing the parents’ responses to those of the faculty and staff revealed no statistically significant differences between the parents and the faculty and staff as they were completing their initial engagement in the Appreciative Inquiry process. There were statistically significant differences, however, between the parents and the faculty and staff when the faculty and staff were assessed a month after the Appreciative Inquiry summit. There were statistically significant differences on Prompt 1 “I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the Appreciative Inquiry planning process,” $t(44) = 2.70, p < .01$; Prompt 5, “I felt energized by the conversations I had during the Appreciative Inquiry planning process,” $t(44) = 3.94, p < .01$; and Prompt 10, “I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school,” $t(43) = 3.47, p < .01$. In all cases, the parents’ mean scores were higher (Prompt 1 $M_{[parents]} = 3.78$; $M_{[faculty and staff, time 2]} = 3.35$; Prompt 5 $M_{[parents]} = 3.96$; $M_{[faculty and staff, time 2]} = 3.39$; Prompt 10 $M_{[parents]} = 3.91$; $M_{[faculty and staff time 2]} = 3.35$). The differences in the total scores were also found to be significantly different from each other (Parents $M = 3.79$, Faculty and Staff $M = 3.42$; $t(44) = 3.38, p < .05$).

Table 7 shows the descriptive statistics from the survey for the faculty and staff immediately after and with one month delay.
Table 7

*Descriptive Statistics for Faculty and Staff Immediately After and with One Month Delay*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Time 1</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(n = 35)</em></td>
<td><em>(n = 23)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td><strong>SD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel motivated to invest more of myself than I did before.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have noticed more positive aspects of this school than I did before.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>0.609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’m feeling more positive about the school.</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>0.535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I felt energized by the conversations I had during the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>0.482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school.</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I’m looking forward to building on what we have accomplished so far.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m encouraged that this process can continue to influence our work in this school.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. These conversations have changed my perspective on the school.</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school.</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I’m more hopeful about the future of our school.</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe we have the capacity to accomplish what we’ve planned.</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.443</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The number of Faculty and Staff participants varied from Time 1 to Time 2 due to faculty and staff absence or conflicts when survey was given.

A repeated measures ANOVA for the comparison between faculty and responses immediately following the appreciative inquiry summit and one month later revealed that the differences were not statistically significant with the exception of Prompt 10, “I’m
pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school” (M

Time 1= 3.83, M Time 2= 3.35, t(56) 2.96, p < .01). Table 8 shows the comparisons of
median and mode analyses from the survey.

Table 8

Comparisons of Median and Mode Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt</th>
<th>Parents (n = 23)</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Time 1 (n = 35)</th>
<th>Faculty and Staff Time 2 (n = 23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>3.0 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel motivated to invest more of myself than I did before.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have noticed more positive aspects of this school than I did before.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’m feeling more positive about the school.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I felt energized by the conversations I had during the Appreciative Inquiry planning process.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>3.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school.</td>
<td>3.0 3.0</td>
<td>3.0 3.0</td>
<td>3.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I’m looking forward to building on what we have accomplished so far.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m encouraged that this process can continue to influence our work in this school.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. These conversations have changed my perspective on the school.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>3.0 4.0</td>
<td>3.0 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>3.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I’m more hopeful about the future of our school.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe we have the capacity to accomplish what we’ve planned.</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
<td>4.0 4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The median data in Figure 2 show that the different stakeholder groups had a relatively consistent positive response rate with 3.0 (*Some*) being the lowest median response on a 1-4 rating scale and 4 (*A Great Deal*) as the most positive response.

![Stakeholder Survey](image)

*Figure 2. Graph of stakeholder overall median results from the survey prompts.*

The mode, or the most frequently answered response for this data, again shows the stakeholder’s positive response to the Appreciative Inquiry process as it relates to the stakeholder’s perception on how the Appreciative Inquiry process affected the school climate, with 4.0 (*A Great Deal*) being the most common response in all but one of the ratings (Figure 3). Stakeholder Overall Mode. The mode for Prompt 6 (“I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school”) was 3.0, for the reasons described previously. Once again, the overwhelming response was positive.

Figure 3 shows the stakeholder overall mode results for the survey prompts.
The range of any data set describes the difference between the maximum and minimum values of the data set. The data show that there was a 3-point differential in responses among parent stakeholder groups on Prompts 6, 8 and 9, and a 2-point differential on the remaining items, with the exception of Prompt 12, where there was a range of only 1 point. The faculty responses were all within one to two points each time the survey was given.

The last aspect of the data that were gathered in this survey was the open-ended qualitative question at the end of the survey, Prompt 13 that asked how the Appreciative Inquiry process changed stakeholders’ perspectives of this study about this school. There were 19 responses to the open-ended Prompt answered by the Faculty and Staff stakeholder group. The responses given can be categorized into three main themes. The responses came from 19 different participants. The response to this Prompt was completed by the faculty and staff stakeholder groups one month after the Appreciative Inquiry process. This was due to the late approval date of the study. To organize all the
responses, I first read each one and then looked for a commonality between the response and other responses. The first theme saw respondents excited about the Appreciative Inquiry process. Of the 19 responses, 13 related to this category on how they felt about the Appreciative Inquiry process. Examples of the responses in this theme were as follows:

“I feel like we are actually going to do something instead of just ‘saying’ so.’”
“We have great ideas and I am very hopeful for the future.”
“I like how everyone is creating positive ideas to connect the school and community. We are very community minded and excited about our school year. It is infectious.”

The second theme from the data centered on how the stakeholders already had a positive perception of the school before engaging in the Appreciative Inquiry process. Three of the 19 respondents identified with this category in their response to the Appreciative Inquiry process. Examples of the responses for this theme are as follows:

“I already had a great perspective, but it led to action and I see that.”
“I never have had much of a negative perspective of our school. I do believe this process had boosted negative mindsets of others. That exact negative mindset is exactly what is holding us back.”
“I expected to be part of a school that values this process.”

The final theme that emerged from this qualitative data discussed a potential skeptical aspect of the Appreciative Inquiry process. Two of the 19 stakeholder participants responded in the following way:
“I felt the process was good, but the concepts a bit vague and not related to the end product. Like how did we get from "app inquiry" to committees. Maybe I'm not abstract.”

“I think it’s great in theory.”

Although these two participants responded in a way that was not necessarily positive to this open-ended survey response, the overall response to this question was that all stakeholders valued the Appreciative Inquiry process, stakeholders were more positive as a result of the Appreciative Inquiry process and the Appreciative Inquiry process had a positive effect on the school’s climate as shown in only 2 of 19 respondents being categorized as not positive. (See Appendix K for a complete listing of all 19 survey responses and the category in which they were placed.) Thus, the answer to Action Research Question 2 was that nearly all stakeholder participants in this study found that the Appreciative Inquiry process had a positive effect on Logan Elementary School’s climate.

Summary

The data show that the Appreciative Inquiry process at Logan Elementary School was well received by all the stakeholder groups who participated in this process. The data gathered for Action Research Question 1 showed that only 3 of the 9 components of the VDOE School Improvement Plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited were addressed by the Appreciative Inquiry Process. However, the Appreciative Inquiry process did help give Logan Elementary School three areas in the VDOE School Improvement Plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited with which to help create a school improvement plan that the state would recognize as a way to help improve the school if it were accredited with warning or
provisionally accredited. (See Appendix L for the relevant portion of the 2019-2020 Logan Elementary School Improvement Plan with the areas the Appreciative Inquiry process.)

The data also showed through the survey given to stakeholder participants at the conclusion of the Appreciative Inquiry process that participants in this study perceived the Appreciative Inquiry as a positive process that helps contributes to a positive school climate which answers the Action Research Question 2. Two participants expressed in their answers to Prompt 13 that the Appreciative Inquiry process was either confusing or good in theory. Both of those responses seem to be outlier answers to the overall positive response to the Appreciative Inquiry process.

The Appreciative Inquiry process showed positive results toward incorporating input from a variety of stakeholders at Logan Elementary School and gave all the stakeholders in this study a voice in how to help improve Logan Elementary School through the school improvement process as well as generate ideas about creating a more positive school climate.
Chapter 5

Recommendations

Implications for Practice

The results of the Appreciative Inquiry process have implications for Logan Elementary School as well as the academic community at large. The findings of this study, when applied in schools, could show benefits both with helping construct a school improvement plan and helping to promote a positive school climate.

Implications for Logan Elementary School

The data from this study show that the Appreciative Inquiry process was well received by the stakeholder groups in this study and the participants found the process to be a worthwhile exercise to help improve Logan Elementary School. This is shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7 by the response to the survey given at the end of the Appreciative Inquiry process. This study has provided opportunities for Logan Elementary School to improve the school climate and help create a school improvement plan. The design teams, specifically the Community Events and Hands on Learning design teams, were able to identify three different components that would satisfy the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) School Improvement Plan requirements. Those areas consisted of designing instructional practices to remediate students who have not been successful on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests, designing intervention strategies to prevent further
declines in student performances, and designing strategies to involve and assist parents in raising their child’s academic progress.

The stakeholder participants in the Appreciative Inquiry process in this study reported over 49 different areas where they saw Logan Elementary School performing well or had hopes for future implementation for optimal performance. When discussing the 49 different areas where Logan Elementary School was working well with the entire faculty the participants discussed with me how they felt proud of their school and the way they were positively affecting the lives of the students, parents and faculty and staff of the school on a daily basis. As Fowler (2013) stated, “education policies must be implemented at the grassroots level—by district administrators, principals and classroom teachers” (p. 18). It also brought to light the fact that even though there were obstacles and issues at the school that the stakeholders in this study felt positive about the job that Logan Elementary School was doing of meeting the needs of all of the stakeholders in a variety of different areas of the school. Part of the power in Appreciative Inquiry is seen in both the process of capturing the positive things that are or have occurred at Logan Elementary School, as perceived by stakeholders, as well as giving the stakeholders the ability to generate and analyze the qualitative data that will be used to help create the school improvement plan.

At the end of the Appreciative Inquiry process, the faculty and staff stakeholder group decided on five different areas on which to concentrate for the remainder of the school year. These areas were Community Events; Extended Engagement Opportunities for Students – Clubs and Field Trips; Hands on Learning – STEAM & Other; Communication; and Sustain Positive Groove (see Appendix G for complete details of
the Provocative Propositions/Possibility Statements and the Commitments, Offers and Requests of each design team). These groups then became the committees that the faculty and staff will serve on for the remainder of the year. Each of these groups address the needs of the students, parents and faculty and staff stakeholder groups. The different design groups stated within their provocative propositions, commitments, offers and requests that they are committed to the positive experience of the stakeholders by improving both the academics of the students, the experiences that all stakeholders have when interacting with the school, as well as improving the climate of Logan Elementary School.

Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, the faculty and staff of Logan Elementary identified the areas they feel are strength and have expanded those areas to incorporate the needs and experiences of the stakeholders of Logan Elementary School. For instance, 2 of the 5 design team themes had none of the VDOE requirements for school improvement plan. Those design teams were the Communication and the Sustain Positive Groove design teams. While these two design team themes did not pertain to the requirements of the VDOE for school improvement, the faculty and staff stakeholder group found that these themes were important to how Logan Elementary worked well as result of the information gathered during the Appreciative Inquiry process. Furthermore, the design teams went beyond meeting the three components that were answered in Virginia Department of Education School improvement requirements as laid out in the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited by also developing areas that would improve the climate of Logan Elementary School. The Sustain Positive Grove design team’s whole purpose is to ensure that all
stakeholders continually have positive feelings about Logan Elementary School as a place to learn, send their students and work. Their commitment to Logan Elementary School is to help foster a positive climate throughout the year, especially in the times when school can be difficult. Additionally, the other design teams are committed to helping the overall experience of all stakeholders which in turn has the potential to help grow the positive climate in Logan Elementary School.

The Appreciative Inquiry process has helped Logan Elementary School faculty and staff work together to help improve the school. Furthermore, the Sustain Positive Groove committee has been active in thinking about and attempting to promote the mental wellbeing of the teachers, staff and students of Logan Elementary. They have initiated events for the staff like bringing in treats on Fridays for the teachers, as well as creating a teacher of the week program that spotlights one or two staff members throughout the week by discussing them, their accomplishments and interests on the morning announcements and having faculty and staff write positive notes to them throughout the week to show them how much they are valued. This team has also started a “Caught you doing something good” program at the school where students are recognized by the teachers and staff as well as other students for their kindness and given prizes for random acts of kindness. The spirit and actions of the committee have made a difference in the climate of Logan Elementary School.

Although Logan Elementary School is not a school that is accredited with warning or provisionally accredited, for much of its history the school has fallen short of the academic achievement level necessary to receive full or partial accreditation. The Appreciative Inquiry process was able to provide a way for Logan Elementary to meet
student focused Components 4, 5, and 7 of the VDOE school improvement plans for Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited.

The implementation of the Appreciative Inquiry process has also had results for Logan Elementary School because one of the areas mandated by the superintendent of Wootten County Schools in the school improvement plan is how the school addresses the need to interact and engage with the parent stakeholders of Wootten County. The committees that were formed by the faculty and staff stakeholder groups as part of the Appreciative Inquiry process that directly address this need are the Community Events and the Communications committees. It was interesting to see how the Appreciative Inquiry process was able to organically solve a need in the school improvement plan without the administration having to insist on a top-down initiative to implement the community interaction portion of the school improvement plan.

Results from the Appreciative Inquiry Stakeholder Reflection Survey responses revealed few statistically significant differences between the stakeholder groups, as compared using an independent sample ANOVA. The difference in the responses from one session to another can be potentially attributed to the fact that the faculty and staff stakeholder groups had not been given enough time to see the strategies developed during the Appreciative Inquiry process take effect within Logan Elementary School. Furthermore, having just two respondents feel skeptical or confused by the Appreciative Inquiry process as stated in the open ended response question shows that the majority of the participants in this study feel positive about the Appreciative Inquiry process. It is improbable that all participants in any new initiative or process would be 100% on board. Although the data are statistically significant and therefore of some interest to examine,
the difference may be small enough that there may not be practical significance to the
difference between the scores since the numbers are so close.

Finally, the one thing that was captured in part by the data and shown through the
Appreciative Inquiry process was the feeling of excitement and the positive energy
generated by the majority of the stakeholders in this study at the end of each of the
Appreciative Inquiry stages as communicated to me verbally by the stakeholder
participants in this study, or as revealed in the positive responses in the survey data. At the
completion of the Discovery Stage, parent stakeholders verbally shared with me how they
thoroughly enjoyed their experience and were happy to be talking about Logan
Elementary in a positive way. Many participants verbally expressed to me how they were
sad that the sessions were not better attended by more parent and community members
because they felt that the process demonstrated how well Logan Elementary School was
already working and that it gave them a better outlook on what was to come in the school
year for them and their students. They wished that more people could have participated in
the process so that they too could feel this way about the school especially in the face of
the start of the new school year. Many expressed their intention to spread the word in the
community about the great things happening at Logan Elementary School. Furthermore,
the faculty and staff stakeholders also were completely engaged in the different activities
that were part of the Appreciative Inquiry process and at the end of the session expressed
how excited they were about what they had experienced that day and for the possibilities
for the school in the upcoming school year. Additionally, since the Appreciative Inquiry
process was so well received by all the stakeholders who participated in this study, it
suggests that the process needs to continue through another round of the Appreciative
Inquiry process the next school year and perhaps even expanding the number and type of stakeholders who are involved in the process. As Schmoker (1999) stated, “if we consistently analyze what we do and adjust to get better, we will improve” (p. 56). This can potentially help Logan Elementary School meeting the needs of its stakeholders and sustain the positive effects of stakeholder participation in the Appreciative Inquiry process. Having only two respondents feel skeptical or confused by the Appreciative Inquiry process further shows the majority of the participants in this study feel positive about the Appreciative Inquiry process.

**Implications for Other Schools**

The results of this Appreciative Inquiry process have implications for other schools. The Appreciative Inquiry process is a relatively inexpensive way for schools to solicit input into what their stakeholders feel they are doing well. Researchers have proposed that schools have greater student academic success when leadership includes an equal and diverse group of stakeholders in the decision-making process (Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). This information can be developed into areas that the stakeholders can use to help improve their school and perceptions of their school climate. The Appreciative Inquiry process also has the potential to generate concrete ways to show the state how schools intend to improve certain areas if their schools are not accredited or are accredited with warning. The entirety of any school improvement plan considers all parts of the school. Although the Appreciative Inquiry process revealed a variety of areas within the school where positive things are occurring, it would be difficult for this process to reveal all areas of opportunity for school improvement plans to address because a school improvement plan
discusses a variety of specific areas of the school needed for improvement that Appreciative Inquiry process may not address. For instance, the school improvement process could discuss budgetary needs and constraints, student attendance and other various measures that are important to the school improvement process, may not be an area that Appreciative Inquiry is able to address due to the lack of knowledge by the stakeholder participants. Therefore, although the Appreciative Inquiry process provides opportunity to help develop the school improvement process, it is not a method that was found to be able to complete the entire school improvement process in this study. However, the Appreciative Inquiry process revealed those areas within the school where the stakeholders believe the school is has the capacity to show greatest growth and therefore contribute to how the school will grow within the larger school improvement plan. Using the Appreciative Inquiry model in this way for other schools would be advantageous because it would address areas of need.

Another important positive finding from this study is that the Appreciative Inquiry process helps lead to change without the administrative having to insist on a top down approach. The participants use the process to give their valuable input into how and where the school is performing well and then making decisions on how to take that information and apply it to the school in the areas they feel they can and want to change in the school. They are making decisions and prioritizing how to improve the school instead of being told how and where to do it.

Finally, by concentrating on the school’s positive attributes to improve the school, Appreciative Inquiry has the ability to potentially help a school see what aspects of the school are valued by their stakeholders and feasibly help the school improve its climate.
Lindahl (2011) argued that “understanding the constructs of school climate and culture by assessing them carefully, and then by using these assessments to guide the planning process, leaders can vastly improve the probability of successful school improvement” (p. 24).

**Directions for Future Research**

The Appreciative Inquiry process helped Logan Elementary School by providing insight into areas of the school that would help develop the school improvement plan and showing areas where improvement the school climate was possible. There are some areas to be considered when contemplating future research for Logan Elementary School as well as for other institutions.

The study specifically targeted two stakeholder groups. When doing this research again, I would consider opening the stakeholder groups up to more potential participants i.e. central office staff, community business owners, school board members, county commissioners and those stakeholders who are of Wootten County, but do not have a student who attends Logan Elementary School because they have no children, or their children are grown. By opening up participation to all stakeholder groups, Logan Elementary School might have the ability to improve the reputation of Logan Elementary School in the community. This might lead to greater investment of resources.

There were only three parent stakeholder sessions and one faculty and staff session during this study. If provided more opportunities to participate in the process, there may be more stakeholders who could give input into how to better improve Logan Elementary School. Furthermore, the three parent stakeholder groups only participated in the Discover Stage of the study and were not included in the Dream and Design Stages of
the Appreciative Inquiry process. I would be interested to see if, after going through the entire Appreciative Inquiry process, the parent stakeholder groups came up with the same major themes as the faculty and staff stakeholder groups did and if not, what implications that would have on the school improvement process and climate of the school. It would also be interesting to see how to incorporate the parent stakeholder groups with the faculty stakeholder groups as members of major theme committees that met throughout the year with a specific area to focus on to improve the school.

Furthermore, due to time constraints, I stopped collecting data for this study after the fourth stage. I would recommend collecting data at the end of the year to see how the participants felt the Appreciative Inquiry cycle contributed to improving the climate at Logan Elementary School. It will be interesting to see how the stakeholders felt at the end of the school year about the potential benefits of the Appreciative Inquiry process before starting this process again with the stakeholder groups. I also was only able to ask the Faculty and Staff stakeholder groups one month after the initial Appreciative Inquiry session the open-ended question about how they felt about the process. When doing the Appreciative Inquiry process again it would be interesting to see the open ended responses from all stakeholders involved in the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Additionally, the Faculty and Staff stakeholder groups in this study were only given one opportunity to complete the survey for second time. If done again, I would give more time for responding to the survey to gain more input.

Summary

Through the Appreciative Inquiry process, I was able to effectively answer this action research questions posed in this study of helping to create a school improvement
plan that the state would recognize as incorporating essential elements to show school improvement as well as help improve the climate of Logan Elementary School. The data from this study showed the Appreciative Inquiry process was seen by the majority stakeholders in this study as a positive way to approach school improvement by shifting the lens of examining the problems of the school to determine what is already going well and then capitalizing on those areas to improve the school. The Appreciative Inquiry process and the results of this study have implications for Logan Elementary School as well as any other school that is looking to have stakeholder input into how to improve their school and improve their school climate. In this current age of accountability, where schools are required to specifically demonstrate what steps they are taking to improve their schools and student learning, this study has shown that the Appreciative Inquiry process gives both high functioning and struggling schools one potential way to answer those difficult questions and provide concrete steps to move a school toward improvement.
References


Schmoker, M. J. (1999). *Results the key to continuous school improvement* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: ASCD.


Appendix A

Logan Elementary School Interview Protocol for the Define Stage

1. Tell me a story about your best experience of working in and being part of the learning community here at LES. Pick a time when you felt most alive, most engaged, and most joyful about your work. Who was involved? What made the experience so positive? Describe the event in detail.

2. Let’s talk for a moment about some things that you value deeply; specifically, the things you value about your work, yourself, and this school.

   a. When you are feeling best about your work, what about the task itself do you value?

   b. Without being humble, what do you value most about yourself as a person and as a member of this school community?

   c. From your experience, what are the core values of this school? Give some examples of how you experience those values.

3. If you had three wishes for this school, that would heighten the vitality and health of the organization, what would they be?

   1.
   2.
   3.
Appendix B

Directions for the Discover Stage

Before we start, I would like to explain a little bit about what we are going to do because it may be a little different from what you are used to. This is going to be an appreciative interview. We are going to ask each other questions about times when you saw things working at their best at LES. Many times, we try to ask questions about things that aren’t working well, the problems, so we can fix them. In this case we try to learn about things at their best, the successes, so we can find out what works and find ways to infuse more of the positive core into LES. It is much like what we do with children and athletes when we affirm their smallest successes and triumphs so they will hold a positive image of themselves and envision even greater possibility. The end result of the interview will help us understand the life-giving forces that provide vitality and distinctive competence and what we do best as an organization here at LES. Before we continue, do you have any questions (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p.113)?

Participants will engage in paired interviews. The interviews will consist of stakeholders introducing themselves to each other and going through the questions that are written on the interview sheet with one another. After both people in the dyad are finished answering the questions and sharing their stories and wishes with each other, each pair will find two to three other pairs to form a small group of six to eight people. Each person will then introduce their partner to the group and share their partner’s stories and wishes. As they listen to each of the stories and the wishes, each group will be invited to identify three to five common themes from what they have heard.
After all the individual’s stories have been shared with the group and the three to five common themes have been identified, you will be asked to record the themes on chart paper. The groups will post their charts in a designated area in the room, and a spokesperson from the group will briefly describe their themes to the whole group. Each stakeholder will then be given three dot stickers. Each stakeholder, working alone, will be given a few minutes to place a dot sticker next to the themes that most resonate with them from all the themes that are shared.

Once the participants return to their seats, the group will then be asked what they notice. It is from this conversation with the stakeholders that they determine as a collective whole what they feel are the most valued life-giving themes from the positive stories shared by the stakeholders. From each of the stakeholder sessions, common themes will emerge of the positive properties and exceptional moments that make LES work at its best.

Redirecting the negative: During your conversations there may be times when your dyad partner is determined to just speak about the negative. If you have listened sufficiently to the seeming negative issues, redirect the interviewee by saying, “I think I understand some of the problems,” and paraphrase a few you have heard and then say, “right now however I would like to focus on times when things were working their best. Can you think of a time, even the smallest moment when you saw innovation (for example) at its best.” If the interviewee says it never happened at CCES before giving up, find out whether if the person ever had the experience anywhere else (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, p. 114).
Are there any questions? Please choose someone as your partner who you do not know very well or would like to get to know better and using the Interview Protocol sheet, introduce yourself and begin the interview process. I will announce when it is about time to find two to three other pairs of people to begin the group aspect of this exercise.
Appendix C

Logan Elementary School Interview Protocol for the Discover Stage

Let’s talk about some of our school’s strengths, the things that have been most positive about your experiences here at this school.

1. Tell me a story about your peak experience of working in, or being part of the learning community here at LES. Pick a time when you felt most involved, most engaged, and most joyful about this school. Who was involved? What made the experience so positive? Describe the event in detail.

2. Describe a time when a group of students were especially engaged in a learning experience or an event here at LES. What were they doing? What led to that high level of engagement? What impact did that experience have on their learning?

3. Share a favorite memory of when relationships between LES and the parents or community were extraordinary, a time when favorable interactions between the community and LES produced remarkable outcomes. Based your experience, what made that experience so positive?

4. If you had three wishes for this school, that would heighten the vitality and health of the organization and bring about positive change, what would they be?
   1.
   2.
   3.
Appendix D

Appreciative Inquiry Discover Stage Participant Group Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Common Themes Discovered</th>
<th>Final Stakeholder Group Overall Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Group A (N = 6)   | 1. Positivity – kids, each other (staff), discipline, outlook, relationships in general (7)  
                  2. Relationships with Parents and Community (5)  
                  3. Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes (3)  
                  4. Staff Morale and Relationships with each other (3)  
                  5. Experiences and Opportunities (3) |
| Group B (N = 6)   | 1. Relationships (3)  
                  2. Students – Leadership (3), Ownership (2), Knowledge, Importance (1)  
                  3. Commitment  
                  4. Perseverance  
                  5. Community involvement (1), interactions (1), connections |
| Parent Stakeholder Group 1 |                           |                                        |
| Group A (N = 4)   | 1. Clubs/Athletics/Music (5)  
                  2. Parent Involvement / communication (3)  
                  3. Literacy/Math Night (3)  
                  4. Field Day (student Collaboration)  
                  5. Community Involvement |
|                   | 1. Field Trip Opportunities  
                  2. Parent involvement and communication  
                  3. Community Events/parent nights/stem& literacy |
6. Student Performances
7. Engaged and Relaxed Activities (PTA & Cultural Events)

Group B (N = 5)

1. Field trip opportunities (6)
2. Communication between school and home (2)
3. Community events/parent nights (more often) i.e. Science and math night (1)
4. Student Engagement (1)
5. Early communication of events
6. Passion and care in what they (LES faculty) do (1)
7. Non-academic opportunities for students
8. Structure of community events

Group A (N = 5)

1. Strong relationships with all stakeholders (5)
2. Communication with stakeholders (3)
3. Mentor Program
4. Problem Solving Ability – Pride in what they do (2)
5. Resources – Human & Tech (2)
6. Parent engagement/Involvement (1)

Group B (N = 4)

1. Celebrate/Positive Recognition – Student shout outs, award ceremonies, adult involvement,

Parent Stakeholder Group 2

1. Engagement – Activities (Turkey Trot, Grandparents Day), Parent Academy’s (Art Night), Academics Highlights (combine fun with academics)
2. Communication with Stakeholders - Student shout outs, award ceremonies, adult involvement, participation, Social media
3. Strong relationships with all stakeholders
participation, Social media, pride, ownership (8)

2. Clubs/Activities for students – after school, hands on activities in class, field trips, involvement in classrooms (5)

3. Participation/Involvement – Combine with academics for activities – Increasing Involvement from All parents (1)

Parent Stakeholder Group 3

Group A (N = 3)

1. After School Programs (6)
2. Enrichment Programs – Advanced programs (5)
3. Engagement Programs
4. Parent/Student night events: Fine arts/science/stem/steam (3)
5. Community Connection
6. View of school – change the way the school is looked at (2)
7. Communication: Parents, Teachers, Students

Group B (N = 3)

1. After School Events – PTO - Lit/Math, Grandparents Day, Turkey Trot, Awards, Parent academy, Field Day, Trunk or Treat (9)
2. Communication – Dojo, Newsletters, etc. (5)
3. Field Trips – Local historical places, ZOO (2)
4. Clubs After School / Transportation (2)
5. Positive!!!
6. Parent Involvement

Faculty Stakeholder Groups

Group A (N = 8)
1. Club day for students on ½ half day Wednesday for kids – lunch buddy program (10)
2. Growth Mindset of parents/community (5)
3. Community collaboration at the end of the year (3)
4. STEAM Lessons – hands on (2)
5. Student led press release program to report to (local newspaper) (2)

Group B (N = 6)
1. Community evening events- International night, literacy nights, math nights, open house (4)
2. Build stronger “Family Bonds” within the staff (1)
3. Respect and Positivity (1)
4. Greater student responsibility (vertically) – reading buddies (older with younger) – role modeling (1)
5. Use of Technology

Group C (N = 8)
1. Favorite memory – Parent involvement and community support, Fine Arts Night, Turkey Trot,
Local Church opening luncheon, - Training / teacher led OneNote, SOL (4)

2. Learning Experience/Event – Hands on experiences that lead to real life scenarios, interest and choices led to engagement & flexible seating (1)

3. Peak Experiences – Collaboration with colleagues & Students, Servicing the whole Child, experiences left long lasting effects

4. Wishes – Parental engagement / training, reaching out more to the community/businesses for support, communication district wide, Positivity/morale, Kinesthetic learning / Hands on

   Group D (N = 8)

1. Building relationships with staff or coworker & students building relationships with teachers and their peers (5)

2. Engaging students with hands on learning experiences – STEAM (5)

3. Creating a positive & healthy environment where parents can be actively involved and engaged (4)

4. Building staff relationships with outside activities
5. Positive community involvement (2)
6. After school activities or clubs: Drama, instruments, choir, holiday programs, talent shows (1)

Group E (N = 5)
1. Maintain positive outlook throughout school year (16)
2. More Creative time for students – Hands on STEAM (5)
3. Look at the child as an individual (3)
4. Vertical planning with staff (3)
5. Engagement (Students & Families – Dad’s breakfast) (2)
6. Continuum across grades and classrooms (1)
7. After school events with families (1)

(*) number of votes given to each theme
Appendix E

Directions for the Dream Stage

In the Dream stage of the 5-D Cycle the stakeholders will be asked to go through the following exercises. The room will be set up with the topics that were decided on by the stakeholders in the Discover Stage of the 5-D cycle displayed on chart paper hanging in different sections of the room. The facilitator will read the following directions:

Get comfortable, close your eyes if you like, and bring one of the chosen interview topics into your mind. Imagine it is 4 years in the future and the topic has been implemented fully in your everyday life and work. Imagine that this is your first day back at work and you are excited because you know that you will find a workplace that has more of that topic present. Wander around your workplace and as you meet people in the course of the day, what pictures emerge that are life-giving and energizing? What are you feeling? What are people doing differently? As you head home from this day, what is lifelike and how has it changed? What conversations do you have with those at home? What do you tell them about the changes at work? Congratulate yourself for being a part of such a healthy and meaningful change in your work and in your life. Open your eyes and return to this room at your own speed. When ready share a few words describing your experience. (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, p. 219).

The facilitator will ask the stakeholders to move to the part of the room where the topic that they were imagining is displayed on chart paper. The group will then share what they imagined. Once the group has all shared their experiences of how they felt and what people were doing differently and what Logan Elementary School in the future, they will be asked to put their collective images into a creative representation of what they heard in their discussions to be presented to the entire group. The groups will have 30 minutes to prepare their presentations. These creative representations can be done as a skit, a song, a poem, pictures, stories, commercials, or a job interview. There is no real
limit to how the images are represented. The only two ground rules are that everyone from the group must be involved in creating and presenting the enactment and that the presentations cannot be viewed as hurtful to anyone. The creative representations will then be shared with the entire group of stakeholders. If there is not an even, or close to even distribution of people throughout the room the facilitator will ask if anyone would be willing to be part of another group, or is there a particular aspect of the topic that another group could be formed around to show a better distribution of the participants.

The last part of the Dream Stage will be spent having the groups create provocative propositions, or possibility statements about the imagined creative representations and images that they shared about Logan Elementary School fully implementing what they decided on in the Discover Stage. The participants will be told by the facilitator that the idea is taking what you have created and put it into writing by making a bold statement about Logan Elementary School existing at its best within your assigned topic. It will become the vision for your group and the rest of the school as we work move the dream into a reality throughout this school year. The groups will be told to write their provocative propositions in large bold letters on the char paper given to them and when they are finished to share them with the entire stakeholder group. Provocative propositions should include the following:

**Great provocative propositions:**
- Stretch and challenge
- Are desired (people want to create them)
- Are exciting and use energizing language
- Represent things people really believe in, such as constitutional beliefs as in “we hold these truths to be self-evident.”
- Describe what is wanted in a positive way (rather than saying what is not wanted)
• Are written in the present tense as if they are already happening. (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008, P. 347)

Other criteria for provocative propositions should ask the following:

• Does it stretch, challenge, or interrupt the status quo?
• Is it grounded? Are there examples that illustrate the ideal as a real possibility?
• Is it desired? If it could be fully actualized would the organization want it? Do you want it as a preferred future?
• Is it stated in the affirmative and bold terms?
• Does it provide guidance for the organization’s future as a whole?
• Does it expand the zone of possible change and development?
• Is it a high involvement process?
• Is it used to stimulate intergenerational organization learning? (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, p. 221)
Appendix F

Directions for the Design Stage

Commitments, Offers & Requests

In the Design Stage of the 5-D cycle the stakeholders will be asked to think about the part of the dream that they want to bring to life. The stakeholders will be given the opportunity to state out loud and put into writing what and how they are willing to pledge to making their provocative proposition, or possibility statement made in the Dream Stage a reality. This will be done by the stakeholders making commitments, offers and requests to bringing their provocative proposition to life over the course of the school year.

In their group all stakeholders will be asked to do the following:

All Stakeholders are to make simple commitments towards the possibility statement. Simple commitments describe actions that can be easily taken, typically within one or two weeks and are within existing authority and resources available to the person making the commitment.

Make offers in the form of a “gift.” For example, a participant may offer to collaborate in response to a request from another request from a group member. An offer could be made to contact community members as a response to a commitment made by someone else in the group. Offers can come in any shape, or form. The more specific the offer, the better.

Requests can be made by group members and are focused on what one person or group needs from another person or group. For example, the communication group would request training on a new communication application from the technology group (Watkins, Mohr & Kelly, 2011, p. 241). Having written down the commitments, offers and requests from the group, our stakeholders now have the groundwork for the work to be done to make their possibility statements, or provocative propositions come to life.
Appendix G
Design Team Themes, Provocative Propositions/Possibility statements and Commitments
Offers and Requests

Design Team 1: Community Engagement

Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement:
We the staff at LES are committed to collaborating and engaging community stakeholders in a cooperative effort to extend and enrich our student’s learning and academic experiences.

Commitments: To attend 1 community event per school year: Fair, Powwow, Church Events, Steak Feast.

Offers: Cover or swap with another staff member; Babysit Parent Academies

Requests: Attendees from each of the groups for the community events

Design Team 2: Extended Engagement Opportunities for Students – Clubs and Field Trips

Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement:
We give our students extended and engaging opportunities so that they are discovering & learning who they are and what their personal interest are to become lifelong learners in our ever changing global society.

Commitments: We are all committed to facilitating an extended opportunity

Offers: Collaborate and recruit other staff and community members

Requests: We need the Communication group to help inform parents and community: We need support from our administration to facilitate transportation.
**Design Team 3: Hands on Learning**

**Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement:**

Logan Elementary School Uses hands on learning to promote and enhance social and emotional skills, cognitive abilities and physical movement; we utilize these skills through collaboration, problem solving and creating

**Commitments:** To practice interdisciplinary hands-on learning in our own environments; to promote and encourage those skills with our colleagues.

**Offers:** To share ideas and materials

**Requests:** Materials through Communication Group and extended opportunities; Promote STEAM club through Extended Opportunities Group

---

**Design Team 4: Communication**

**Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement:**

We believe that the doors of LES are open to all of the community of Wootten County and beyond. We welcome the community to visit our school. We will provide easy access to information about our programs and services. We value communication with all our community stakeholders.

**Commitments:** We commit to providing easy access to our programs and services

**Offers:** We offer a variety of communications – Online & Social media communication; Weekly newsletters; Phone calls; emails; DOJO messages; face to face; Thursday folders home with students.
**Requests:** We request community liaisons from the community stakeholders to assist us in helping us spread “the word.”

**Design Team 5: Sustain Positive Groove**

**Provocative Proposition/Possibility Statement:**

We the Logan Elementary School learning community are sustaining positivity and a sense of unity by ensuring everyone feels welcomed, valued and uplifted as individuals in our school.

**Commitments:** Greeting every student positively daily. When positivity fizzles, we commit to rallying the positive.

**Offers:** Positive and uplifting support; Reviewing Community practices and communication for positive impact / effectiveness

**Requests:** Time to provide our positive support; Space specifically designed for positive notes
Appendix H

Appreciative Inquiry Stakeholder Reflection Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directions: The following are statements about your perception of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process. Please indicate the extent to which each applies, from Not at All (1) to A great Deal (4).</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel more optimistic about our school than I did before the AI planning process</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel motivated to invest more of myself than I did before.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have noticed more positive aspects of this school than I did before.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I’m feeling more positive about the school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I felt energized by the conversations I had during the AI planning process.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I’m already seeing positive changes in how we do things in our school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I’m looking forward to building on what we have accomplished so far.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I’m encouraged that this process can continue to influence our work in this school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. These conversations have changed my perspective on the school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I’m pleased with the strategies that we’ve come up with as a way to improve our school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I’m more hopeful about the future of our school.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I believe we have the capacity to accomplish what we’ve planned.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please provide written response to the following Question:

How did the Appreciative Inquiry process change your perspective about this school?
Appendix I

School Improvement Plan Rating Template

Does the plan developed by the Faculty & Staff Stakeholder Group Address the following areas:

Name and Components of the Group Plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Components of the Group Plan:</th>
<th>Not at all (0)</th>
<th>A little bit (1)</th>
<th>Some (2)</th>
<th>Fully (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A description of how the school will meet the provisional accreditation benchmarks, or the requirements to be Fully Accredited, for each of the years covered by the plan;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Specific measures for achieving and documenting student academic improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The amount of time in the school day devoted to instruction in the core academic areas;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Instructional practices designed to remediate students who have not been successful on SOL tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Intervention strategies designed to prevent further declines in student performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Staff development needed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Strategies to involve and assist parents in raising their child’s academic performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The need for flexibility or waivers to state or local regulations to meet the objectives of the plan;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. A description of the manner in which local, state, and federal funds are used to support the implementation of the components of this plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J

Virginia’s Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited

School Improvement Planning

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Schools Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate

Schools that are Accredited with Warning or Provisionally Accredited-Graduation Rate are required by the Standards of Accreditation, 8VAC 20-131-310.G, to develop a three-year School Improvement Plan.

School Improvement Planning Requirements

Per the Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia, 8VAC 20-131-310.G, schools that are Accredited with Warning or Conditionally Accredited-Graduation Rate are required to develop a three-year school improvement plan which includes the following components:

- A description of how the school will meet the provisional accreditation benchmarks, or the requirements to be Fully Accredited, for each of the years covered by the plan;
- Specific measures for achieving and documenting student academic improvement;
- The amount of time in the school day devoted to instruction in the core academic areas;
- Instructional practices designed to remediate students who have not been successful on SOL tests;
- Intervention strategies designed to prevent further declines in student performance;
- Staff development needed;
- Strategies to involve and assist parents in raising their child’s academic performance;
- The need for flexibility or waivers to state or local regulations to meet the objectives of the plan; and
- A description of the manner in which local, state, and federal funds are used to support the implementation of the components of this plan.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/support/school_improvement/planning/index.shtml
Appendix K
Appreciative Inquiry Reflection Survey

Question 13 Answers

The following answers were coded as Excited

1. It gave me more insight on what the school was about and the students we service.

2. The AI process helped investigate the current needs of our school, identify the way to meet those needs and then we are actually applying them.

3. It opened me up to sharing with my colleagues, which makes me feel more positive overall.

4. It made me feel like a welcomed and respected member of this community.

5. It showed how positive the environment is and how encouraged the staff is.

6. Always room for improvement.

7. Putting focus on the positive takes away from the negative.

8. I think that by introducing us to the AI process, many of our staff have tried to be more positive and optimistic about our current situation.

9. I like how everyone is creating positive ideas to connect to the school and the community. We are very community minded and excited about our school year. It’s infectious.

10. I was able to view many different ideas on school improvement then choose which one I related to the most. There were many ideas all possible and doable.

11. AI made me aware of the strengths of the team we are working with.

12. We have great ideas and very hopeful for the future of our school.

13. I feel like we are actually going to be doing something instead of saying so.
The following responses were coded as Already Positive

1. I already had a great perspective, but it led to action and I can see that.
2. I never have had much of a negative perspective of our school. I do believe this process has boosted the negative mindset of others. That exact negative mindset is what is holding us back.
3. Opened my mind to new ideas and how far we have come already.
4. I expected to be part of a school that valued this process.

The following responses were coded as Skeptical

1. I think it is great in theory.
2. I felt the process was good, but the concept a little vague and not related to the end product. Like how did we get from “app. Inquiry” to committees. Maybe I’m not abstract.
Appendix L

Logan Elementary School Improvement Plan related to the Appreciative Inquiry Process

Pursuing Excellence
Logan Elementary School

WOOTTEN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Strategic Plan for School Improvement 2019-2020

VISION
Wootten City Public Schools will be an exemplar model of rural education where collaboration, critical thinking, communication, and creativity are practiced developing adults who contribute positively to the global society.

MISSION
The mission of Wootten City County Public Schools is to develop self-sustaining, responsible and educated adults who can contribute and work to improve their community and the world.

CORE VALUES
- **Integrity** – the quality of being honest, transparent, and operating with virtue and ethics
- **Heritage** – honoring the cultural traditions and history of the past, acknowledging and observing cultural traditions
- **Learning** – the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and insight through formal and informal opportunities of teaching, research and enlightenment
- **Communication** – the effective exchange of ideas, information, feelings, and news between stakeholders
- **Respect** – the mutual space where courtesy is shown, honor is given, obedience is practiced and objectivity exercised with an open mind.
Strategic Plan Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL 1</th>
<th>GOAL 2</th>
<th>GOAL 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>Engage</td>
<td>Empower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus Areas for School Improvement

**GOAL 4:** Engage

**FOCUS AREA OBJECTIVES**

- Provide multiple means of communication to families.
- Offer events to bring families and community members to school

**STRATEGIES:**

- Ensure weekly newsletters are sent from each homeroom teacher
- Post major school events on social media
- Administrative communication via email and phone encouraging participation in school wide events.
- Monitor teacher communication logs
- Monitor parent access to PowerSchool grade portal.
- Send home written communications in the form of flyers to parents to advertise upcoming events at the school.
- Hold third annual Turkey Trot in November for entire school community
- Hold a Holiday concert
- Hold at least 4 parent engagement nights
- Bi-Monthly family engagement events that are partnered with PTO
  - Hold a twice yearly book fair and invite parents to attend
Vita
Edward Martin Van Dyke

Education: 2010 – 2020
The College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, Virginia
Doctor of Education

2003 – 2005
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia
Master of Science in Education

1998 – 1993
Wheeling Jesuit University
Wheeling, West Virginia
Bachelor of Arts – History

Professional Experience:

2016 – Present
Principal
Charles City Elementary School
Charles City County Public Schools,
Charles City, Virginia

2012 – 2016
Assistant Principal
Berkeley Middle School
WJCC Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia

2011 – 2012
Student Advancement Coach
Berkeley Middle School
WJCC Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia

2007 – 2011
6th Grade History Teacher
Berkeley Middle School
WJCC Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia

2005 – 2007
6th Grade History Teacher
Davis Middle School
Hampton City Schools, Hampton Virginia

Awards: 2011
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WJCC Public Schools, Williamsburg, Virginia

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