

## What is the best approach for my school/district?

Along with its companion resource ([Assessing Wellbeing in Schools](#)), this resource has been designed to help educators in their efforts to improve wellbeing through the five steps below. These five steps correlate closely with the five D's of the Appreciative Inquiry model, which has proven effective in promoting positive, strength-based change in many organizations.



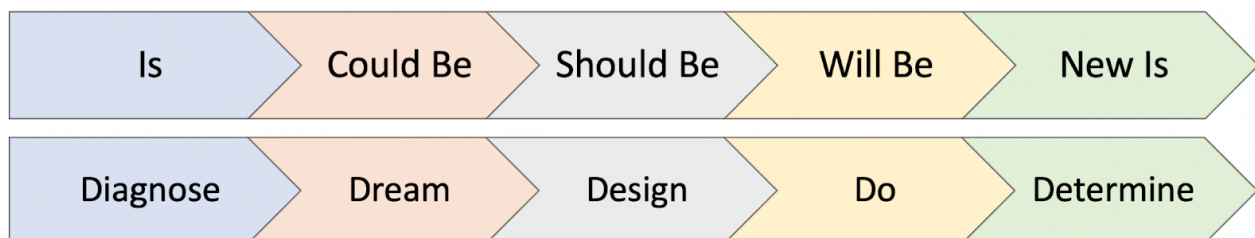
Appreciative Inquiry helps members of an organization connect to the best in each other and build on their individual strengths (Cooperrider, 2015). Appreciative Inquiry is particularly effective because ALL staff members are encouraged to be involved in the inquiry process and “are empowered to be active members in the change process” (Waters & White, 2015, p.22). When staff actively participate in the Appreciative Inquiry process, they have a greater level of buy-in, ownership, and commitment to the proposed change (Temkin Benchmark Study, 2017 cited in Cooperrider, 2015). This process is not to be done by a few administrators cloistered in their office. Rather, the five steps presented below should be carried out with an array of stakeholders who can both give detailed, honest feedback, and whose energy, ownership, and momentum will be needed to carry out agreed-upon plans and interventions. This often includes school leaders, teachers leaders, faculty, staff, parents, students, community leaders, and district/state educational leaders.

This resource focuses primarily on steps 2-4, while the companion resource focuses primarily on steps 1 and 5 ([Assessing Wellbeing in Schools](#)).

1. **Diagnose** the current wellbeing of students, teachers, and the school community by choosing and using valid and reliable wellbeing assessment tools. Examine what has worked and is working. See our companion resource [Assessing Wellbeing in Schools](#) for diagnostic tools.
2. **Dream** with relevant stakeholders about the reality we are hoping to create by exploring what could and should be in place.
3. **Design** and choose appropriate and well-matched interventions based on the findings of the diagnosis. Determine timelines, resources, personnel, and other aspects critical to implementing the intervention(s).
4. **Do** what you planned, monitoring and adjusting along the way as needed.
5. **Determine** the impact of the implemented interventions using valid and reliable wellbeing assessment tools. Adjust as needed. Again, our companion resource [Assessing Wellbeing in Schools](#) may be helpful in determining how to best evaluate your school's wellbeing efforts.

It might be helpful for your school team to think about this process in the following way.

1. **Diagnose:** What is currently in place?
2. **Dream:** What could be in place?
3. **Design:** What should be in place?
4. **Do:** What will be in place & how will we do it?
5. **Determine:** How is the new reality going?



Let's examine each of these steps in a bit more depth.

## Step 1: Diagnose: Where are we?



*If staff want to know if the school is achieving its purpose and how to continually improve all aspects of the school, multiple measures—gathered from varying points of view—must be used. Education for the Future*

Conducting a comprehensive diagnosis of current wellbeing is one of the first steps in improving wellbeing for individuals and schools, because schools and their “leaders seldom rise above the quality of the information available to them” (Maxwell, 1973, p. 68). An unfounded, knee-jerk, or “inaccurate diagnosis can lead to the wrong selection of strategies for improvement that at best will do little harm and at worst could distract the school from a direction of travel that would be more productive” (Leithwood, 2013, p. 256). Schools are often simultaneously and ironically “awash in data” (Fisher and Frey, 2015, p. 80) while lacking valid and reliable data on factors that directly and indirectly impact student and teacher wellbeing. Because “our current data-driven decision making is to a great degree standardized-test-data-driven decision making” (Schmoker, 2008, p. 70), schools often have little valid and reliable information about student, teacher, and organizational wellbeing. While we care deeply about student learning data we get from district, state, and national tests of academic achievement, those data alone are not enough to give us a full picture of wellbeing. “Using multiple measures can really improve decision making” (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012, p. 103), so we advocate identifying and using several triangulated measures that can provide a more holistic, complete, and relevant view of wellbeing in your current context. You may find our companion resource, [Assessing Wellbeing in Schools](#) helpful in your process of selecting different tools that can provide a more holistic view and diagnosis of the current state of wellbeing for your students, educators, and overall school.

An important part of this phase is purposefully identifying and emphasizing the “bright spots” (Heath & Heath, 2010), or “positive deviants” (Cameron, 2012) within the school. What is working? Why is it working? How do we build on that success? Surely “Providing feedback on weaknesses and deficiencies is also important, of course, but a focus on weaknesses or deficiencies will lead only to the development of competence (Clifton & Harter, 2003), whereas a focus on strengths can lead to excellence and positively deviant performance” (Cameron 2012, p. 75). With this clear view of

where you are as a school and what is working well for you, you are ready to move on to the next phase, dreaming of positive possibilities.

## Step 2. Dream: What could be?



*We need [people] who can dream of things that never were. John F. Kennedy*

Once your school has an accurate view for your current reality, and in particular, your strengths, it then becomes time to start envisioning the many bright possibilities for the future. This phase encourages your team to explore a wide range of possibilities for your school. David Cooperrider recommends using this phase to allow stakeholders to share their success stories and experiences from the Diagnostic phase. One way this can be accomplished is by facilitating “dream dialogue” by asking stakeholders questions about their hopes and wishes for the future of your school and wellbeing efforts (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 28). This should help your school identify and dream about interventions that are successfully being used by some in your school and could be scaled up to the entire school. In addition to identifying the successful interventions already happening at your school, it can be powerful to identify successful interventions used by other schools and organizations. This resource is uniquely designed to help your school identify successful interventions used by other schools and organizations that could be adopted in your school. Here are some guiding questions that might help with this phase:

- What are some untapped opportunities for our school’s wellbeing efforts?
- What are the bright spots within our school and how could we scale those up?
- Where have other schools and organizations found success?
- What are some of the interventions that we could potentially try?
- Wouldn't it be amazing if...

### Step 3. Design: What should be and will be?



*If you chase two rabbits, you will not catch either one. Old Russian Proverb*

While there are certainly a lot of fantastic, evidence-based interventions described in this resource, not all will be a good fit for your current context. We advise schools to take a measured approach in identifying the most essential and impactful interventions, and implement those with full fidelity. It is up to your school leadership team, faculty, and other stakeholders to carefully consider your mission, vision, values, contexts, and circumstances when identifying which interventions should be implemented in your context. Here are a few guiding questions to consider in choosing which interventions to implement in your wellbeing improvement plan:

- Based on our school's current context, which of the untapped opportunities and interventions are the best fit for us both short and long term?
- Which interventions are of highest priority to our aspirations and in what order should interventions be implemented?
- What time, materials, and space will this require?
- What type of training and ongoing support will this require?
- Are we confident that this is the intervention that deserves these limited resources?
- Can we fully commit to pursuing this path?

## Step 4. Do: Let's get to work!



*Leading wellbeing efforts at a school "is not a solo act" (Buffum, Mattos, and Weber, 2012, p. 20), but requires the best collective ideas and efforts of the school community.*

School leaders cannot do this alone; having a "single visionary leader is an outdated presupposition in an increasingly complicated world" (Reason, 2014, p. 17). Ed Catmull noted, "Successful leaders embrace the reality that their models may be wrong or incomplete. Only when we admit what we don't know can we ever hope to learn" (2014, p. xvi). We would do well to "assume leadership exists in all corners and levels of all organizations" (Schein & Schein, 2018, p. xi) and rely heavily on others, knowing that "people support what they help to create" (deFlaminis, Abdul-Jabbar, & Yoak, 2016, p. 35). As such, schools serious about improving wellbeing ensure that this work is ongoing and of highest priority among all stakeholders and teams (eg. school leadership teams, parent teams, student leadership teams, teacher teams, community councils, etc.). Here are some ideas that might help your school successfully implement your wellbeing improvement plans together.

### Clarify the Compelling Why

Amidst the hustle and bustle of schools, we can easily get caught in the whirlwind, feverishly bouncing from one urgent issue to the next, forgetting why we do what we do. We must help ourselves and others remember the very deep, noble, and personal reasons we became educators. Among other things, these reasons usually include building and blessing students' wellbeing. Let's tap into educators' deep desire to bless lives by tastefully sharing students' authentic experiences about how their wellbeing has been transformed at school. Truthfully, "if school leaders cannot provide a compelling why, the staff will not care about the what" (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012, p. 21). Transforming student wellbeing is our noble and compelling why.

## Create Safe Conditions

Murphy and Seashore-Lewis remind us that “The role of leadership is to create positive environments in which human beings can thrive” (2018, p. 1). Just as gardeners cannot force seeds to grow, we cannot micromanage or force wellbeing interventions to flourish at our schools. We can intentionally work toward creating the conditions and climates needed for our collective efforts to blossom. Amy Edmondson describes such conditions: “If leaders want to unleash individual and collective talent, they must foster a psychologically safe climate where employees feel free to contribute ideas, share information, and report mistakes” (Edmondson, 2019, p. xvi). The relationships and cultures in our schools among the adults must be such that each adult feels safe and encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, ask questions, tactfully disagree, and make course corrections. As Fullan and Kirtman explain: “Students cannot be empowered by unempowered teachers, and principals cannot empower teachers without being empowered themselves” (2019, p. 69). We empower others and ourselves by conveying humility, vulnerability, candor, connection, equality, curiosity, and no-blame continuous improvement. Efforts to ensure these attributes are practiced engenders trust and builds relationships. Leithwood reminds us that “Effective leaders know that people are not their best asset; they are their only asset, so the need to nurture, develop, and strengthen relationships is at the very core of what good leaders do” (Leithwood et. al, 2013, p. 261). With these types of conditions our wellbeing intervention efforts will have rich soil, plenty of water and sun, and will be free of entangling weeds that would otherwise hamper growth.

## Build Capacity

While many educators have the desire to improve wellbeing, few have received specific training about how to actually improve wellbeing. Linda Darling-Hammond (2017) and others propose some great strategies for helping build the skills and capacities of educators looking to implement new interventions:

- Learn together – Read articles, watch video clips, and attend trainings, conferences, and classes together. Truly, “People grow at lightning speed with the right kind of developmental investment” (Frei & Morriss, 2020, p. 109).
- Study positive examples – Visit other schools and teams that are bright spots in supporting wellbeing. “If we study what is average, we will remain merely average” (Achor, 2010, p. 10).
- Focus and simplify – Focus improvement efforts on those areas most important to your school. Break mastery into small, meaningful goals, and implement incrementally. “A major failure of education reform has been its exhaustive and exhausting call for doing ‘more,’ without identifying what to do less of” (Wagner & Dintersmith, 2015, p. 260).
- Adjust time, schedules, budgets, and spaces –Get creative with time, space, and funds to clear the path for implementation. As Heath and Heath explain, “Tweaking the environment is about making the right behavior a little bit easier and the wrong behaviors a little bit harder” (2010, p. 183).
- Ongoing modeling, coaching, feedback, and reflection – Ensure that each educator has access to successful models, dollops of feedback, constructive coaching, and ample time for reflection. Jim Knight observes: “I seem to learn best when someone shows me how to do it, watches me, and then gives me feedback” (2007, p. 110).
- Experiment & take risks - Ensure there is a safe culture of productive risk taking, responding to failure, and making gradual improvements. “Giving people the space to mess up and learn from their mistakes can have an extraordinary impact on organizations” (Frei & Morris, 2020, p. 123).

## Run a Pilot

We rarely get things completely right the first time around. Large corporations would never dream of rolling out a new product without running at least one pilot. Most organizations run a beta trial followed by version 1.0, then version 2.0, and so on. Pilot programs allow schools to work out the inevitable bugs of solid interventions, and to identify weaker interventions that should not be scaled up schoolwide. Sometimes piloting interventions allows schools a safe way to “get started, then get better” (Eaker & Keating, 2009, p. 51). Schools can then make needed adjustments, to “shift course based on what [they] are learning” (Fullan, 2019, p. 72) before scaling an intervention up to a larger group.

## Give it Time & Adapt

Sometimes schools enthusiastically implement new interventions, only to abandon them prematurely. Jim Knight warns: “During the ‘attempt, attack, abandon cycle,’ someone introduces a new practice into a school, and teachers make a half-hearted attempt to implement it. Then, before the program has been implemented effectively, individuals in the school or district begin to attack the program. As a result, many of the teachers implementing the program now begin to lose their will to stick with it. Inevitably, even though the practice was never implemented well, leaders in the district reject it as unsuccessful, and abandon it, only to propose another program that is sure to be pulled into the same vicious cycle, to eventually be attacked and abandoned for another program, and on and on” (Knight, 2007, p. 200). We should expect that the old way of doing things will be easier for a time; feeling uncomfortable or stressed about new ways of doing things is very normal. Let’s ensure we give these new interventions a fair chance at having their intended impact.

In contrast, as we jump into improving student wellbeing and try different interventions, the goal is not necessarily to get it perfect right up front, but to monitor, adjust, and nimbly adapt as needed. One of the co-creators of Pixar, Ed Catmull, mused: “How do we go about creating the unmade future? I believe that all we can do is foster the optimal conditions in which it –whatever ‘it’ is–can emerge and flourish. This is where real confidence comes in. Not the confidence that we know exactly what to do at all times but the confidence that, together, we will figure it out (Catmull & Wallace, 2014, p. 224). Fullan and Kirtman further observe, “Our guess is that at the beginning you may not know how to proceed. In fact, we suggest that you not be too sure of yourself about strategy. Instead, you need to convey that the strategy will be worked out jointly with members of the organization that you have some ideas about how to approach the situation but will need other ideas” (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019, p. 100). While these principles may seem oxymoronic, we need to both give interventions time to run their course, while adapting them as needed to our unique circumstances (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009).

As we start implementing our plans and interventions, these five recommendations should help your school move forward effectively:

- Clarify the Compelling Why
- Create Safe Conditions
- Build Capacity
- Run a Pilot
- Give it Time & Adapt



## Step 5. Determine: How's it going?



*Every time a new initiative is put into place, a plan for measuring its effectiveness should accompany its implementation. Anne Conzemius, 2012, p. 25*

A popular notion suggests that people in unfamiliar terrain often walk in circles. In a study designed to better understand this claim, scientists at the [Max Planck Institute](#) confirmed that without a visible landmark, people really do walk in circles, cross their own paths, and despair at their lack of progress. Because identifying a clear, stable, undisputed landmark or goal is one of the challenges in wellbeing work, sometimes we tend to walk in circles. School improvement guru Victoria Bernhardt warns: “Too often, schools in this country conduct their education programs with little formal analysis of how well those programs work. Teachers and administrators rely instead on ‘gut feelings’ about what’s working and what isn’t” (Bernhardt, 2000, p. 33).

A key component of developing an effective wellbeing program is pre-, post-, and ongoing assessment and evaluation. Waters and White remind, “If you treasure it, you must measure it” (2015, p.27). A baseline measure of your school’s wellbeing will be an instrumental landmark in assessing the effectiveness of the interventions you choose to implement. It is imperative that these measures are evidence-based and reliable. Some may shy away from assessing or measuring wellbeing in schools due to the perceived imprecision of wellbeing measures, choosing instead to pursue more traditional goals and measures that are seemingly easier to measure or more precise. This reminds us of the man who was looking for his keys under the lamppost because the light was better there, even though he had dropped his keys several feet away from the lamppost. While no wellbeing measure (or any measure for that matter) is perfectly precise, there are many solid wellbeing assessments, with more coming available. Truly “it is much better to be approximately right in these measures than precisely wrong” (Constanza et al., 2013, p. 7). The companion book to this current work, [Assessing wellbeing in schools: An educator’s practical guide for measuring wellbeing](#), provides an in-depth review of many research-based measures of wellbeing for students and teachers. We encourage you to study this

and other wellbeing assessments that may be a good fit for your school. As you start assessing wellbeing, you may want to consistently ask the following questions (see Conzemius, 2012):

1. Who is the intervention intended to serve?
2. Who is actually being served? Who is not being served?
3. Is the intervention being implemented with fidelity?
4. How is implementation being monitored? Should it be monitored differently?
5. What are the results?
6. Is it having the level of impact that makes it worthy of our investment?
7. What adjustments could/should be made?
8. What are our best next steps?

We offer a few reminders that should better support our measurement efforts. First, use your results to actually drive improvement. As Thomas Many and colleagues point out, “Regular measurement alone does nothing to improve results; it is only the action educators take through results analysis that truly leads to improved achievement” (2018, p. 30). Fisher and Frey similarly warn, “Schools are awash in data, and teachers are being asked to gather data in a myriad of high-tech and low-tech ways. But gathering is not analyzing, and without analysis there’s little reason to gather the data in the first place. It’s like picking apples off the tree, only to let them rot rather than consume them” (Fisher and Frey, 2015, p. 80). Our second reminder is to never forget that the data collected from these assessments are directly linked to individuals. “It is an exercise of futility indeed to assemble massive arrays of facts or statistics unless we understand the flesh and blood world they represent...it is the worth of souls that is great—not statistics” (Maxwell, 1973, p. 30).

Taking frequent, and consistent measurement within a set timeframe (monthly, bimonthly, annually) will provide your team with the information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of wellbeing interventions. Taking a measurement and analyzing the information received should inspire your team into further inquiry, allowing you to repeat the diagnose, dream, design, do, and determine cycle for continuous upward improvement.

Select the five steps of the implementation process included in this chapter.

<input type="checkbox"/> Design
<input type="checkbox"/> Diagnose
<input type="checkbox"/> Dream
<input type="checkbox"/> Do
<input type="checkbox"/> Discover
<input type="checkbox"/> Determine

## References:

Achor, S. (2010). The happiness advantage: The seven principles of positive psychology that fuel success and performance at work. New York, New York: Corwin.

Bernhardt, V. L. (2000). Intersections. Journal of Staff Development, 21(1), 33-36.

- Buffum, A., Mattos, M. & Weber, C. (2012). *Simplifying response to intervention: Four essential guiding principles*. Bloomington, IN; Solution Tree Press.
- Cameron, K. (2012). *Positive leadership: Strategies for extraordinary performance* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Catmull, E., & Wallace, A. (2014). *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming unseen forces that stand in the way of true inspiration*. New York: Random House.
- Clifton, D., O., Harter, J., K. (2003). Investing in strengths. In: K. S. Cameron, J. E. Dutton and R. E. Quinn, Eds., *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a new discipline*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koeller, pp. 111-121.
- Constanza, R., Wilkinson, R., Pickett, K., & Kubiszewski, I. (2013). *Why now? A contribution towards the first IEWG meeting*. Paper presented at the International Expert Working Group, Thimphu, Bhutan.
- Conzemius, A. (2012). The “X” factor is why: A clearly defined purpose boosts the impact of data analysis. *Journal of Staff Development*, 33(4), 20-25.
- Cooperrider, D. (2015, July 6). P2: Mirror flourishing: Appreciative inquiry and the designing of positive institutions [Address]. Fourth World Congress on Positive Psychology, Johannesburg, South Africa.  
<https://edtechbooks.org/-PsGB>
- Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Retrieved from Palo Alto, CA: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/effective-teacher-professional-development-report>
- deFlaminis, J.A., Abdul-Jabbar, M. & Yoak, E. (2016). *Distributed leadership in schools: A practical guide for learning and improvement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Eaker, R., & Keating, J. (2009). Deeply embedded, fully committed. *National Staff Development Council*, 30(5), 50-55.
- Edmondson, A. C. (2019). *The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2015). Don't just gather data—Use it. *Educational Leadership*, 73(3), pp. 80-81.
- Frei, F. & Morriss, A. (2020). *Unleashed: The unapologetic leader's guide to empowering everyone around you*. Harvard Business Review: Boston, MA., p. 109
- Fullan, M. (2019). *Nuance: Why some leaders succeed and others fail*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin.
- Fullan, M., & Kirtman, L. (2019). *Coherent school leadership: Forging clarity from complexity*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Fullan, M., Gallagher, M. J. (2020). *The devil is in the details*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, p. 77
- Heath, C., & Heath, D. (2010). *Switch: How to change things when change is hard*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press
- Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Leithwood (2013), *Jossey-Bass Reader on Educational Leadership* (3rd Edition). Somerset, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons.

- Many, T. W., Maffoni, M. J., Sparks, S. K., & Thomas, T. F. (2018). Amplify your impact: Coaching collaborative teams in PLCs at work. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press., p. 30.)
- Maxwell, N. A. (1973). A more excellent way: Essays on leadership for Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company.
- Murphy, J., & Seashore Louis, K. (2018). Positive school leadership: Building capacity and strengthening relationships. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Reason, C. (2014). Stop leading like it's yesterday!: Key concepts for shaping today's school culture. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2018). Humble leadership: The power of relationships, openness, and trust. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Schmoker, M. (2008). Measuring what matters. Educational Leadership, 66(4), p. 70-74.
- Wagner, T., & Dintersmith, T. (2015). Most likely to succeed: Preparing our kids for the innovation era. New York: Scribner.
- Waters, L. & White, M. (2015). Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change. International Journal of Well-being, 5, 19-32. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i1.2>



This content is provided to you freely by EdTech Books.

Access it online or download it at

[https://edtechbooks.org/addressing\\_wellbeing/what\\_is\\_the\\_best\\_app](https://edtechbooks.org/addressing_wellbeing/what_is_the_best_app).