

# The Need for Appreciative Advising within Inner-City High Schools

NICOLE KAFORSKI

University of South Carolina

## Abstract

*Inner-city high school students typically do not receive encouragement or positive relationships within their academic and home environments. Introducing the Appreciative Advising framework model to inner-city schools will allow educators, counselors, and advisors alike to create a more supportive and caring environment for these students. These steps to reaching out to their students will ultimately make students feel more comfortable approaching and speaking with their mentors. As a result, mentors can use the Appreciative Advising framework model to get to know their students, and serve as supporters and guides for these students on their personal and academic journeys.*

All students deserve an inspiring learning environment filled with teachers and advisors who care. Lack of intentional care and attention from their educators can hinder a student's ability to adapt to the college environment (Howell, 2010). As a result of my high school experience and classroom observations, I am advocating for training teachers and counselors of high school students in the Appreciative Advising theory-to-practice framework model. I believe that the Appreciative Advising framework will be especially beneficial for those students from low-SES backgrounds within inner-city school districts.

Appreciative Advising involves using positive, open-ended questions to build relationships with students and other school constituents (Bloom, Hutson, and He, 2008). One of the key underpinnings of the Appreciative Advising framework is the Appreciative Mindset. The Appreciative Mindset encourages educators to look for and focus on the positives rather than the negatives, and promotes encouraging, open-minded interactions with students (Bloom, Hutson, He, & Konkle, 2013). For example, instead of honing in on a student's weaknesses or faults, educators should be intentional in looking for the student's strengths and best qualities. In doing so, educators will be better able to assist in serving as motivators, support systems, and guides for students through their personal and academic journeys. Because many low-SES high school students experience a lack of resources and support from their families, schools, and communities (Rumberger, 2001), this positive mindset will allow students to feel more comfortable around educators and advisors, and see these mentors in a more positive light. Additionally, the Appreciative Mindset provides "an individualized approach for each student" (Howell, 2010, p. 3). In order to increase successful transitions to four-year colleges, it is necessary for educators to recognize the diverse backgrounds low-SES high school students come from and to better understand and attend to this student population as a whole, and as individuals (Howell, 2010; Hamrick & Stage, 2004).

Appreciative Advising allows schools to critically examine their practices, students, and curriculum through an alternative lens. When schools adopt Appreciative Advising's theory-to-practice framework, they can create a healthier school environment by not only connecting with students, but with co-workers too (Howell, 2010). The Appreciative Advising framework has six phases – Disarm, Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver, and Don't Settle (Bloom, Hutson, & He, 2008):

1. The *Disarm* phase reminds educators to get to know their students and build trusting relationships with students. For example, instead of having a desk serve as a boundary

between an advisor and a student, reorganizing and redecorating the advisor's office so that it is more open and visually friendly will help students feel more relaxed. Eliminating the desk allows for an advisor to get on the students' level and create a more conversational space, rather than having the desk create a defined hierarchy between the advisor and the students. Once this open environment is set up, the advisor can begin getting to know the student through the use of the *Discover* phase.

2. The *Discover* phase serves as a beneficial tool for educators in getting to know students on a more personal and non-authoritative level. Through the use of open conversation and open-ended questions, educators can use this phase to gain a better understanding of which areas a student excels in or has the potential to excel in. Students may not readily recognize the skills and abilities that they possess as academic strengths. Additionally, their needs and wants may not align with what they have experienced within their academic and home environments. Thus, educators can seize this opportunity to bring focus to the students' desires and connect these desires and strengths to academic opportunities.
3. The *Dream* phase will encourage educators and students alike to identify their needs and dreams for the future. Acknowledgement of available opportunities, and the motivation to attempt to address needs and barriers can be discussed.
4. In the *Design* phase, educators trained in Appreciative Advising will be better prepared to discuss college and financial aid options with students and their parents. Influential factors such as socioeconomic status, community involvement, a student's individual motivation and self-accountability, family education and involvement, and type of school should be taken into consideration for approaching college and financial processes (Hamrick & Stage, 2004).
5. The *Deliver* phase empowers the student. With the support and encouragement of a school professional, students attempt to carry out the plan co-created during the *Design* phase. It is important for educators to help students learn from obstacles encountered while pursuing their plan.
6. The *Don't Settle* phase reminds educators and students alike that it is important to have high standards and clear consequences for when the standards are not met. Students and educators can also use the Appreciative Advising framework to enhance the effectiveness of their relationships outside of school by continuing to ask positive, open-ended questions.

When successfully applied, the six phases of Appreciative Advising can increase student retention and success, create a more meaningful and committed connection between students and their educators, and produce a positive learning atmosphere that offers a plethora of opportunities. By building and strengthening relationships and schools, the Appreciative Advising framework can be used to optimize educational experiences for all students.

#### References

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