What if …

You created a home court advantage in your classroom and school?

A home court advantage is the statistical advantage a sports team has when they play on their own home court. You can choose to have a home court advantage in your classroom and school. Why would we want to? Because when we create a positive environment, students feel safe to participate—safe to argue their point of view based on the information they’ve been gathering, to speak in small and large group discussions, and to “take the ball and run with it” when it’s their turn to be the team leader.

There are three essential ingredients to home court advantage: a strong sense of safety, support and belonging. In a safe atmosphere of support and belonging, students are more willing to step out of their comfort zone and take risks. When they’re willing to take risks, they participate and learn more. Everyone can get involved, including staff, parents and students. When we have a home court advantage, everyone on the entire team enjoys the benefits.

Three Ways to Strengthen Your Home Court Advantage

**Build Rapport:** Get into the students’ world. Build bridges to students through relationship. Listen to them. Discover what interests them. Give sincere apologies when appropriate. Ask for their advice when things do not go as well as planned. Share yourself. It demonstrates that you care, and that everybody is on the same team.

**See Tens:** Hold all your students as able, and envision a number 10 on every single one of their foreheads as a reminder of their potential. It is a well-established fact in education that the expectations of the teacher have a direct effect on student performance. Seeing all students as tens regarding their potential can help us communicate in subtle yet powerful ways. Students will begin to upgrade their own opinion of what is possible.

**Create Joy and Wonder:** When it’s there, you can feel it immediately—that excitement for learning and discovery. It’s contagious. If the teacher has it, it won’t take long for the students to catch it. Create a sense of curiosity and wonderment. Celebrate learning. Acknowledge every effort. Yes, Common Core and other state standards emphasize more rigorous content, higher levels of reading material and more analytical thinking. But we don’t get there with a hammer approach. Students must be “enrolled and engaged” first. Learning should be exciting, intriguing, challenging, and can even be fun. Don’t we all perform better when we love our work? Students are no different!