

## The Role of Student Aspirations in Today's Schools

Today's students want to be successful, whether their goal is to learn algebra or a trade, get good grades or go to college. Too often, however, students can't reach their future goals and dreams because their schools' conditions are not supportive. The key to understanding whether supportive conditions exist is to ask the students themselves.

The *8 Conditions that Make a Difference*<sup>®</sup> in promoting student aspirations have been identified and defined by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, an internationally known leader in the study of student aspirations. The 8 Conditions are: *Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action*. The 8 Conditions make a difference because they help schools put into practice the three Guiding Principles that facilitate Aspirations work: *Self-Worth, Active Engagement, and Purpose*.

### **Developing Students' Self-Worth:**

#### ***Belonging, Heroes, and Sense of Accomplishment***

*Self-Worth* begins when students experience a sense of Belonging: They feel like they are part of the school community while being recognized and appreciated for their uniqueness. Students also experience *Self-Worth* when someone in their lives believes in them. They need Heroes: people they can look up to, respect, and learn from. To develop *Self-Worth*, students also need a Sense of Accomplishment. They must be recognized as much for their effort, perseverance, and citizenship as they are for high grades and good test scores. As students build *Self-Worth*, they are more likely to persevere through difficult tasks and be inspired to take the steps needed to reach their goals.

### **Fostering Students' Active Engagement in Learning:**

#### ***Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, and Spirit of Adventure***

*Active Engagement* means that students experience Fun & Excitement in their learning. They become so involved that they almost lose track of time. At the end of the lesson, they wonder, "Where did that time go?" Actively engaged students are not afraid to ask "Why?" or "Why not?" about the world around them. Curiosity & Creativity are alive in the way they learn, fostering inquisitiveness and a desire to satisfy their minds with new discoveries. Engaged students also have a Spirit of Adventure. They are not afraid to try new things or to take on healthy challenges, regardless of whether they might succeed or fail. With *Active Engagement*, learning becomes important in and of itself.

### **Encouraging a Sense of Purpose:**

#### ***Leadership & Responsibility and Confidence to Take Action***

Schools must challenge students to think about their *Purpose* -- *who* they want to become as well as *what* they want to be. To reach this goal, students need to explore what it means to have, and create, a successful and rewarding life. *Purpose* is about being responsible, accountable, and confident. To develop *Purpose*, students need the opportunity to assume Leadership & Responsibility in their lives. They must learn to make decisions and understand the consequences of their choices. When students have *Purpose*, they have the Confidence to Take Action toward a meaningful, productive, and rewarding future. They believe in themselves and are motivated to reach their dreams.

All members of the school community can foster the 8 Conditions, making a positive difference in the lives of today's students by supporting the goals those students set and strive to reach.

## The *My Voice*™ Student Survey

The *My Voice* Student Survey assesses student aspirations by asking students questions based on each of the 8 Conditions. By asking students how they perceive their school environment, *My Voice* provides educators with a powerful tool for understanding both what motivates and inspires students to achieve and how well students believe their school is meeting those objectives.

## Measuring Student Aspirations in Your School

This report provides information that can help guide your school system in its ongoing efforts to elevate student aspirations, improve student achievement, and promote the highest teaching and learning standards. The data gathered from the *My Voice* Survey is meant to help your school explore the 8 Conditions as they relate to your school's unique mission. Areas of strength and areas of concern can be identified from the data, but must be interpreted within the school culture and weighted in importance by teachers, administrators, and students. In conjunction with other information about your school, community, and students, *My Voice* is a powerful tool for initiating innovative, meaningful school change.

For more information, please visit [myvoice.pearsonfoundation.org](http://myvoice.pearsonfoundation.org).

## How to Use This Report

The *My Voice* Student Report gives educators a unique chance to look at their school, student aspirations, and the 8 Conditions *through the eyes of students*. The purpose of this report is to provide a context for exploring how students view the teaching and learning they experience in their school and how those views align with the school's mission and vision. By exploring and discussing these results, schools will gain valuable insights into the relationship between student aspirations and school culture. Those insights can lead to promising action plans aimed at fostering teaching and learning environments in which all students are inspired, and able, to reach their goals.

Below are some suggestions for understanding and using the data in your report.

### Demographics

- First, gain an overall picture of your students by looking closely at the Demographics. Refresh your understanding of who your students are, their backgrounds, and how they spend their time.

### The 8 Conditions

- Continue by studying the data reported for the 8 Conditions. The report is organized around each of the 8 Conditions so that every Condition can be explored individually.
- Look for connections among the results that warrant deeper discussion. For example, did a high percentage of students say they enjoy learning new things, while a high percentage also said school is boring? How might these two findings be related?
- Note areas of strength and celebrate!
- Note areas of concern and take steps to understand and make improvements.

### Keep in Mind

- Working with the results is a process, not an event.
- Critical analysis is much more time-consuming than taking the survey itself.
- Comparisons within your own school (e.g., by grade level, gender, etc.) are often instructive.
- Ongoing conversations among colleagues *and students* provide the best way to gain a deeper understanding of the data.
- Perceptions of the same data may differ. This is not only common, but also a healthy starting point for dialogue and growth.
- The purpose of this entire effort is to improve the teaching and learning environment in your school.

## Demographic Summary

The demographic data are presented both as counts and as percentages.<sup>1</sup>

**Total number of respondents: 238**

Gender of Students			Age of Students			Grade of Students		
Gender	Count	Percent	Age	Count	Percent	Grade	Count	Percent
Male	118	50.4	9	0	0	6	35	14.8
Female	116	49.6	10	0	0	7	36	15.2
			11	21	9	8	39	16.5
			12	33	14.1	9	35	14.8
			13	41	17.5	10	33	13.9
			14	33	14.1	11	26	11
			15	30	12.8	12	33	13.9
			16	33	14.1			
			17	31	13.2			
			18	10	4.3			
			19	1	0.4			
			other	1	0.4			

Students Planning on Going to College			Participants in Cocurricular Activities			Racial Heritage of Students		
College	Count	Percent	Cocurricular	Count	Percent <sup>2</sup>	Racial Heritage	Count	Percent <sup>2</sup>
Yes	186	79.1	Music	63	26.5	White	225	94.5
No	11	4.7	Theater	17	7.1	Black/Afr. Amer.	2	0.8
Undecided	38	16.2	Sports	167	70.2	Hispanic/Latino	6	2.5
			Academic Clubs	34	14.3	Asian	1	0.4
			Student Council	19	8	Native Hawaiian	1	0.4
			Other	41	17.2	Am. In./Alsk. Nat.	12	5
			Not Involved	32	13.4	Other Pacific Islander	1	0.4
						Other	15	6.3

<sup>1</sup> Count totals for specific demographics may not equal the total survey count, as not all respondents report demographic information. Total percentages may not equal one hundred due to rounding and missing data.

<sup>2</sup> In this table, the percentages may total more than 100% since respondents were instructed to select all that apply.

## The 8 Conditions that Make a Difference

*Belonging*

*Heroes*

*Sense of Accomplishment*

*Fun & Excitement*

*Curiosity & Creativity*

*Spirit of Adventure*

*Leadership & Responsibility*

*Confidence to Take Action*

The 8 Conditions have positive effects on the development of student aspirations in schools. The descriptions of these Conditions outline an approach that frames how schools can recognize and nurture the development of student aspirations. The 8 Conditions represent a return to the common belief that every educator holds: There is nothing more important than motivating students to learn. The identified 8 Conditions do not represent an exhaustive list, but each is important if we are to have self-assured, inspired, and goal-directed students. All schools can benefit by creating and cultivating these Conditions in the lives of their students.

*"Aspirations is the ability to dream and set goals for the future  
while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams."*

-Dr. Russell J. Quaglia

## Belonging

The Condition of **Belonging** means that a student is a valued member of a community while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. It is a relationship between two or more persons characterized by a sense of connection and support. A sense of Belonging is an important condition for a student's feeling of well-being, social engagement, and competence. The Condition of Belonging increases intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community. Teachers have the opportunity to establish a culture of Belonging in their classrooms, one that promotes their students' sense of well-being, connection, and self-belief.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
School is a welcoming and friendly place.	68%	65%	69%	83%	89%	62%	63%	64%	54%	55%	
I feel accepted for who I am at school.	69%	71%	66%	86%	92%	66%	57%	67%	62%	48%	
Teachers make an effort to get to know me.	56%	59%	51%	74%	81%	55%	46%	48%	36%	41%	
I have difficulty fitting in at school.	17%	16%	19%	26%	8%	13%	20%	15%	16%	24%	
Teachers care about my problems and feelings.	50%	49%	50%	82%	64%	44%	46%	42%	28%	34%	
I am proud of my school.	64%	59%	68%	91%	83%	64%	40%	67%	56%	44%	
I am a valued member of my school community.	43%	41%	44%	56%	56%	41%	49%	30%	44%	22%	
I think bullying is a problem at my school.	36%	38%	36%	47%	28%	31%	46%	24%	32%	47%	

## Heroes

**Heroes** are the everyday people -- teachers, friends, family -- in students' lives who inspire them to excel and to make positive changes in attitude and lifestyle. Heroes are the people students can connect with, who have a positive influence on them, and who listen to and value their ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself. Teachers can be heroes to their students. Students can look up to teachers as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Building relationships with students through support, guidance, and encouragement enables them to become more confident in their academic, personal, and social growth.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Students respect teachers.	56%	57%	54%	51%	58%	54%	54%	55%	62%	58%	
My parents care about my education.	97%	96%	97%	100%	100%	97%	97%	94%	92%	94%	
I have a teacher who is a positive role model for me.	84%	83%	84%	83%	92%	77%	80%	91%	76%	88%	
Teachers care about me as an individual.	56%	56%	54%	77%	69%	46%	54%	48%	56%	36%	
Teachers care if I am absent from school.	53%	51%	54%	71%	50%	59%	51%	55%	48%	34%	
If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk.	63%	60%	64%	68%	61%	69%	54%	55%	68%	66%	
Teachers respect students.	65%	64%	66%	79%	69%	72%	69%	61%	56%	47%	
Students respect each other.	29%	28%	29%	35%	42%	33%	26%	27%	16%	19%	

### Sense of Accomplishment

The Condition of **Sense of Accomplishment** recognizes effort, perseverance, and citizenship as signs of a student's success. Educators have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment that refers to academic achievement, innate ability, or who is "best in the class." Sense of Accomplishment, however, is viewed in terms of personal growth and effort, not just through measurable outcomes and countable successes. Teachers have the opportunity to celebrate their students' accomplishments in visible ways. Taking time to recognize and support students' efforts can help motivate them to persevere through difficult tasks, creating an appreciation for hard work and dedication.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
I am encouraged to practice good citizenship at school.	81%	79%	82%	94%	89%	84%	80%	73%	72%	70%	
Teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.	73%	69%	78%	86%	89%	64%	60%	76%	65%	73%	
I have never been recognized for something positive at school.	15%	16%	13%	9%	14%	21%	14%	9%	16%	21%	
I give up when schoolwork is difficult.	17%	22%	13%	0%	6%	15%	29%	21%	16%	34%	
Teachers recognize me when I try my best.	61%	59%	62%	71%	69%	68%	57%	48%	60%	53%	
Teachers let my parents know what I do well.	54%	51%	56%	79%	72%	49%	51%	39%	40%	41%	
I put forth my best effort at school.	73%	68%	79%	97%	81%	63%	77%	64%	60%	69%	
Getting good grades is important to me.	91%	87%	95%	94%	94%	90%	94%	97%	84%	81%	

### Fun & Excitement

The Condition of **Fun & Excitement** is characterized by students being inspired. They are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their schoolwork. Students who exhibit Fun & Excitement are usually self-confident, curious, and prepared; they are willing to meet the challenges of the day. Teachers who foster Fun & Excitement provide new opportunities, initiate challenges, and respect individual interests. The first three Conditions -- Belonging, Heroes, and Sense of Accomplishment -- help establish a learning environment in which students can feel safe to have fun together in learning.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
I enjoy being at school.	46%	38%	53%	74%	64%	28%	31%	45%	35%	39%	
Teachers enjoy working with students.	71%	69%	71%	89%	83%	64%	71%	58%	62%	66%	
Teachers make school an exciting place to learn.	44%	44%	43%	71%	56%	49%	29%	39%	32%	30%	
School is boring.	46%	51%	42%	21%	34%	59%	49%	52%	64%	47%	
I enjoy participating in my classes.	66%	66%	66%	85%	67%	59%	60%	70%	68%	56%	
Teachers have fun at school.	52%	48%	55%	62%	56%	54%	47%	42%	48%	50%	
Learning can be fun.	73%	66%	78%	85%	69%	64%	66%	76%	68%	81%	

### Curiosity & Creativity

The Condition of **Curiosity & Creativity** is characterized by inquisitiveness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and an eagerness to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask "Why?" while creativity gives them the initiative to ask "Why not?" The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. Teachers can devote extra attention to creating a classroom environment that promotes questioning and creative exploration in order to maintain student motivation.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	70%	75%	63%	86%	83%	62%	66%	64%	62%	63%	
My teachers present lessons in different ways.	80%	80%	82%	83%	92%	84%	76%	85%	69%	70%	
At school I am encouraged to be creative.	70%	66%	73%	97%	75%	64%	60%	70%	64%	58%	
I enjoy working on projects with other students.	71%	67%	74%	91%	78%	82%	74%	52%	63%	47%	
My classes help me understand what is happening in my everyday life.	43%	42%	43%	59%	61%	38%	46%	39%	20%	31%	
School inspires me to learn.	62%	61%	63%	76%	72%	51%	60%	67%	48%	59%	
I enjoy learning new things.	82%	78%	86%	94%	78%	67%	86%	85%	84%	88%	
I learn new things that are interesting to me at school.	69%	67%	70%	88%	78%	67%	66%	52%	68%	63%	
What I learn in school will benefit my future.	72%	67%	77%	97%	69%	69%	85%	73%	36%	63%	

### Spirit of Adventure

The **Spirit of Adventure** is characterized by a student's ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home, with family and friends. Students experience the Spirit of Adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or success. Teachers can encourage and support students' Spirit of Adventure by urging them to explore new things. When teachers create an atmosphere that allows for healthy decision making and risk taking, students can become more confident and resilient. Students with the Spirit of Adventure see life as full of opportunities worth exploring for their own sake.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
I like challenging assignments.	33%	30%	36%	37%	36%	23%	38%	33%	23%	36%	
I push myself to do better academically.	83%	76%	90%	94%	89%	74%	89%	85%	76%	70%	
Students are supportive of each other.	41%	42%	40%	43%	64%	41%	38%	42%	28%	27%	
I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.	25%	22%	29%	18%	31%	33%	23%	30%	16%	22%	
Teachers help me learn from my mistakes.	64%	65%	61%	91%	75%	63%	63%	55%	48%	44%	
I want to do my best at school.	87%	78%	96%	100%	89%	82%	86%	88%	80%	84%	
I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.	53%	47%	57%	71%	56%	54%	63%	64%	28%	25%	

## Leadership & Responsibility

The Condition of **Leadership & Responsibility** means students are able to express their ideas and are willing to accept consequences for their actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Fostering leadership empowers students to make just and appropriate decisions and to take pride in their actions. Teachers who promote this Condition teach and expect their students to be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students are trusted to make the right decisions and are recognized for doing so.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Students have a voice in decision making at school.	44%	46%	43%	63%	42%	46%	50%	39%	38%	30%	
I see myself as a leader.	64%	66%	61%	80%	61%	54%	74%	61%	72%	45%	
Other students see me as a leader.	29%	28%	30%	31%	36%	34%	17%	30%	32%	24%	
Teachers encourage students to make decisions.	74%	73%	74%	85%	81%	87%	63%	70%	68%	59%	
Teachers are willing to learn from students.	48%	43%	53%	53%	61%	51%	40%	55%	29%	44%	
I am a good decision maker.	64%	63%	66%	62%	58%	56%	83%	61%	72%	59%	
I know the goals my school is working on this year.	44%	42%	46%	59%	64%	49%	31%	33%	56%	16%	

## Confidence to Take Action

**Confidence to Take Action** is the extent to which students believe in themselves. It encourages them to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This Condition is at the heart of what educators ultimately strive for: instilling in their students a confidence in and expectation of success. Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval. Teachers have the ability to help build their students' Confidence to Take Action by providing support, celebrating diversity, and encouraging independent thinking. By enhancing the quality of academic and personal growth, teachers empower their students to become active and involved members of their learning environments.

Survey Statements	Total in Agreement	Gender		Grade							
		Male	Female	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
I believe I can be successful.	92%	88%	97%	94%	92%	87%	94%	97%	88%	94%	
I believe I can make a difference in this world.	68%	67%	70%	80%	67%	54%	80%	67%	72%	61%	
Teachers believe in me and expect me to be successful.	75%	76%	73%	91%	92%	67%	68%	70%	72%	64%	
Going to college is important for my future.	85%	82%	89%	91%	86%	79%	86%	94%	88%	75%	
I work hard to reach my goals.	85%	81%	89%	100%	89%	77%	86%	76%	83%	81%	
I am excited about my future.	88%	81%	94%	91%	89%	79%	91%	85%	92%	88%	
I think it is important to set high goals.	87%	81%	92%	94%	86%	77%	91%	88%	84%	88%	
I know the kind of person I want to become.	83%	81%	85%	94%	83%	79%	79%	82%	80%	84%	
School is preparing me well for my future.	63%	63%	62%	91%	75%	63%	60%	52%	48%	44%	