

MY VOICE NATIONAL STUDENT REPORT (GRADES 6-12) 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Students who have aspirations have the ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams. The presence of high aspirations is fostered by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations' 8 Conditions that Make a Difference®: Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action. These Conditions provide an organizing structure for the report.

The *My Voice*™ Student Aspirations Survey assesses various aspects of student aspirations by asking students to respond to 63 statements about the 8 Conditions, as well as a set of demographic questions. For the present report, the *My Voice* Survey was completed by 19,444 students in grades 6-12 during the spring of 2010. Forty-three schools from six different states (from the South, Midwest, and Northeast regions of the United States) representing various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds were included.

Results show that while there are a number of positive signs across these Conditions, the overall picture suggests there are many areas in which today's schools must improve if our students are to reach their full aspirational potential. This overall message is reflected in the results for the Condition of Belonging. Some points of encouragement can be found in this Condition; for example, nearly three-quarters of students report feeling accepted for who they are at school, and a relatively small proportion (17%) say that have difficulty fitting in at school. However, the greater theme for Belonging was one of disconnection; less than half of students think their teachers care about their problems and feelings, feel they are a valued member of the school community, or are proud of their school.

Student reports for the Heroes Condition look similar. On the positive side, about three-quarters of students have a teacher who is a positive role model, and the vast majority of students feel their parents care about their education. At the same time, only about half of students believe their teachers care about them as individuals, care if they are absent from school, or feel they have a teacher with whom they can talk if they have a problem. Respect among students and teachers in the school setting is generally low.

Results around Sense of Accomplishment are somewhat more promising, though there remains room for improvement. Three-quarters of students reported that they are encouraged to practice good citizenship and that teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful. Roughly nine in ten students believe getting good grades is important to them. Despite this, a notably lower percentage of students (72%) actually put forth their best effort in school, and even fewer (62%) feel that their teachers recognize them when they do. Nearly one in five give up when they encounter difficult schoolwork.

Unfortunately, students do not typically report schools to be places where they experience much Fun & Excitement. Less than half of students say they enjoy being at school. Only slightly above one-third think their teachers make school an exciting place to learn. Roughly half report that school is boring. At the same time, seven in ten believe learning can be fun, suggesting dividends are likely to be paid to schools which seek to improve this Condition.

The results for Curiosity & Creativity are more positive, though again they point to needed improvements. Roughly three-quarters of students report enjoying learning new things, feel that what they learn in school will benefit their future, and say their teachers present lessons in different ways; about seven in ten report learning new things in school that are interesting to them. At the same time, only two-thirds report that creativity is encouraged in their school, and even fewer (59%) feel inspired to learn in school. Barely four in ten feel their classes help them understand what is happening in their everyday lives.

Similar pluses and minuses are evident in the responses indicating Spirit of Adventure. On the upside, at least eight in ten students report pushing themselves to do better academically and desire to do their best in school. On the downside, most students do not report liking challenging assignments, and most do not feel that fellow students are supportive of each other in their school. Approximately one-quarter of all students are reluctant to challenge themselves because they are afraid they might fail. And if they do make mistakes, less than two-thirds of students feel their teachers will help them learn from them.

Results for Leadership & Responsibility show that while most students are relatively confident in their leadership skills (roughly two-thirds see themselves as leaders and good decision makers), their impressions of the school environment suggest they are not typically given opportunities to actualize these capacities. Indeed, just over one in three students feel that other students see them as leaders. Moreover, less than half of students feel they have a voice in decision making at school or believe that teachers are willing to learn from students.

Perhaps the most encouraging of the Conditions results are for Confidence to Take Action. Clear majorities of students (at least eight in ten) report high goal-striving and confidence in their ability to be successful, along with some sense of the kind of person they want to become. Fewer, but still a reasonably high number of students report teachers believing in them and expecting them to be successful (74%). Still, only about two-thirds of students report confidence that they can make a difference in the world and that school is preparing them well for their futures, which certainly leaves room for improvement.

Beyond reporting on the Conditions, the results were broken down by male versus female, and (separately) by middle school versus high school. On the whole, there are few gender differences of practical significance. Females typically report higher effort and goal-striving, and greater enjoyment of being at school. Similarly, the differences between students' reports in middle school and high school are, for all practical purposes, relatively small. The differences that do exist suggest that students in middle school put in more effort and are more likely to feel school is preparing them well for their futures, and that teachers communicate more often with their parents. Additionally, bullying is reported to be more of a problem in middle school than high school.

Overall, we find the results of the 2010 *My Voice* (grades 6-12) National Student Report in places rather encouraging, and in others quite eye-opening. In general, students report relatively high levels of confidence in themselves, interest in learning, and desire to set and achieve their goals. At the same time, their perceptions of the school conditions that might foster their aspirations suggest fairly high levels of boredom and disengagement, a relative lack of relevance of school to their daily lives, generally low levels of respect among teachers and students, and rather mixed impressions of the supportiveness of their teachers. Taken together, students' general self-confidence and desire to achieve, coupled with schools' apparent struggles to engage and support them, may be a recipe for reduced performance, dropout, and ultimately a squandering of the full potential of our youth. If schools are to be places in which teaching and learning thrive, this must change. Listening to the voices of students is the first step.

