



# **The Aspirations Profile**

*Fourth in a Series of Six Voice & Aspirations Briefs*

What accounts for the difference between a student who talks about goals and one who reaches them? What marks the difference between a teacher who works hard but has lost a sense of purpose and one who remains inspired by the difference they make for their students and the world? The difference is in their aspirations—the *ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams*. As the definition suggests, there are essentially two key dimensions of the aspirations profile: dreaming and doing.

The [Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations](#) (QISVA) believes that today’s schools need to foster student and teacher aspirations by encouraging them to be both dreamers and doers. This is easier said than done, since individuals tend to fall into one group or the other. We can all think of students who have lofty dreams but don’t put forth the necessary effort to reach those dreams. On the flip side, we all know students who put forth effort and work hard every day, but have no real goals for the future to work towards. Presenting yet another challenge are those students who don’t think about the future at all and don’t put forth effort in anything. Schools also need to foster teachers’ aspirations by encouraging them to live out their professional dreams in connection to their present efforts in their classrooms and schools. When teachers act on their hopes and dreams, they are better equipped to support their students in doing the same.

The Aspirations Profile presents a model of various behaviors that support or hinder success. The categories help us understand specific challenges teachers and students might experience when seeking to achieve their aspirations. Recognizing where one resides within the profile is a first step to creating an actionable plan for optimal success in and outside of the classroom. We are all able to reach our fullest potential when we put *dreaming and doing together*.

## The Aspirations Profile

In order to help schools foster aspirations, QISVA has developed the Aspirations Profile, which presents a visual model of the behaviors that support or hinder success. The Aspirations Profile has two dimensions: Dreaming and Doing. Within the dimensions are four categories: *Hibernation*, *Perspiration*, *Imagination* and *Aspiration*. These categories help us understand the specific challenges of fostering aspirations with various individuals.

**Aspirations Profile**

	Low	Present/Doing	High
Future/Dreaming	<p><b>Imagination</b></p> <p>Sets goals for the future but does not put forth the effort to reach those goals</p>	<p><b>Aspiration</b></p> <p>Sets goals for the future and puts forth the effort in the present to reach those goals</p>	
	<p><b>Hibernation</b></p> <p>Has no goals for the future and puts forth no effort in the present</p>	<p><b>Perspiration</b></p> <p>Works hard in the present but has no goals for the future</p>	

## HIBERNATION

Someone who does not think about the future, has no clear goals, and puts forth no effort in daily life is in *Hibernation*.

Students in this category feel isolated, have low self-esteem, lack connections with positive role models, and feel stuck. These students are labeled—sometimes unfairly—as lazy, troublemakers, drifters, and loners. They are characterized as students who don't care about anything ... including themselves. Students in *Hibernation* lack a sense of purpose and rarely experience a sense of accomplishment in anything they do. For these students to move out of *Hibernation*, they need to feel like they belong. More specifically, they need to feel like they are part of a community while being recognized for who they are as individuals. Hibernating students also need a hero in their lives, someone they can look up to, someone who believes in who they are—and who they can become. Finally, students in this category must have a sense of accomplishment to feel that their efforts are paying off. They need to learn that if they work hard at something, there will be benefits. These are not bad students; they just have no self-worth or motivation.

Educators who are in *Hibernation* have lost the passion for teaching and changing the lives of students, seem complacent (at best), and put forth little effort in the daily life of their classrooms or the school community. Teachers in this category are often isolated in their own rooms, lack meaningful relationships with colleagues, and feel stuck. Minimal effort is put into lesson planning and delivery, and each school day seems to drag along at a snail's pace for both them and their students. Classroom instruction is boring to the instructor, let alone the students. These teachers are often described as checked-out, lazy, or simply drawing a paycheck until the next summer break or retirement. They are often characterized as unenthusiased, burnt out, or unmotivated.

## PERSPIRATION

*Perspiration* defines someone who works exceptionally hard and puts forth effort, but lacks a sense of purpose.

This can be seen in students who show up on time, always seem to be at school, and put forth the necessary work, but lack dreams for the future. Thus, they are working hard every day, yet seem to be going nowhere. These students are labeled as conscientious and diligent, but directionless; they often stay out of trouble but see no meaningful future in front of them. There tend to be fewer students in *Perspiration* than in any other category of the Aspirations Profile. The challenges these students face can be dealt with relatively easily. Students in *Perspiration* need a role model: a hero that they can look up to and admire, and someone who will hopefully enlighten them to the possibilities that lie ahead. These students must gain a sense of accomplishment and see the direct implications of their hard work and effort *toward* some personal future goal. Students in *Perspiration* must also be taught how to set goals and why goals are important to achieve their maximum potential. Educators need to provide these students with leadership opportunities and the chance to be responsible for their actions and choices. Students in this category can show incredible growth once they understand their hard work and effort can have a great impact on their futures.

Teachers within the quadrant of *Perspiration* tend to work exceptionally hard on a consistent basis, yet end up spinning their wheels. There is a lack of forward movement in their teaching practices and with student learning. These can be the teachers whose cars are always in the parking lot; they may be the first to arrive at school and the last to leave. They are frantically busy all the time and sit on numerous school committees. These teachers are often frustrated by their lack of progress and results given their tremendous effort. They may be on the edge of burnout.

## IMAGINATION

The category of *Imagination* is characterized by individuals who readily share their future plans, but who show little, if any, effort to reach those dreams.

Students in *Imagination* have positive ideas and attitudes about their futures, but they don't take steps in the present to reach their goals. It is easy for these students to tell us they are going to college, that they want to be doctors, teachers, or building contractors, but when it comes to doing what is necessary to reach those goals, students in this category fall short. These students are characterized as being dreamers, disconnected from reality, impractical about real-life situations, and idle. Students in *Imagination* can be the most pleasant students to be around, but when it comes to getting something done, they rarely follow through. They need motivation in the present to do the work necessary to reach their goals. Helping them find fun and excitement in their everyday school lives is critical to connecting their current daily actions to their future hopes and dreams. They need an environment in which they are challenged to be curious and creative so they see the ties between learning and their futures. Ultimately, students in *Imagination* need to be encouraged to have a spirit of adventure. They must be challenged to step outside of their comfort zones and have the confidence to take action in the real world. They need to learn it is okay to try something new—whether the outcome is success or failure. They need to take responsibility for their dreams and make them real ... *today*.

Teachers living in the quadrant of *Imagination* are filled with amazing ideas and positive attitudes about the school, students, and life in general. These teachers enthusiastically jump aboard every new program or project. They appear to have the “right answers” in conversations with colleagues and administrators, and they are often a breath of fresh air as they optimistically articulate the way forward for schools. These teachers speak of how wonderful current reform efforts are, how much they love all of their students, and about all the new ideas they have for improving instruction in their classroom. Unfortunately, when it comes to taking action to reach these goals, teachers in the state of *Imagination* fall short. These teachers are described as having their head in the clouds, unrealistic, and sorely lacking in follow-through. They are full of grand ideas, but also empty promises.

## ASPIRATION

Individuals in the *Aspiration* category have the ability to think about the future and set goals for themselves.

Students in *Aspiration* are inspired in the present to work toward those goals. They are hardworking and dependable and seem to be always moving forward with a sense of purpose. They have clear intentions about what they want to do and who they want to become, and they have committed the energy, time, and resources to meet their objectives. These students have a sense of direction and, even if the direction changes, they are equipped to meet the challenges of the day and continue to pursue their dreams. They think beyond themselves and realize the world is not there to serve them, but they have something to offer the world to make it better. To maintain their high aspirations, students in the *Aspiration* category need to be guided and supported in pursuit of their goals. They need to be given challenges and recognized for their effort and perseverance. Their successes need to be celebrated. *Aspiration* students have the opportunity to be role models for other students. They can show all students that when they set goals for themselves and put forth the effort to reach those goals, they can and will be successful.

Teachers in the *Aspiration* quadrant have the ability to Dream *and* Do. They are able to balance generating creative ideas with setting specific actions to achieve their goals, both in the short term and the long term. These teachers are hardworking, efficient, and highly dependable. They achieve results. They willingly learn from their failures and try different approaches when needed. These teachers authentically enjoy their job and are energized by trying new things. These individuals are fully engaged in the day-to-day process of teaching and learning. Their contributions to staff conversations are honest,

realistic, positive, and supportive of continuous improvement. Teachers in the *Aspiration* quadrant are able to clearly articulate their dreams and goals, and they follow through by committing the energy, time, and resources necessary to meet established objectives. Teachers with aspirations are equally committed to the health and well-being of the entire school community as they are to their own classroom. They view their job as a privilege and a responsibility to continually make improvements so the school can more effectively serve *all* students.

## Concluding Thoughts

Understanding the dynamics of aspirations is a complex endeavor. The Aspirations Profile is designed to provide a simple matrix for understanding the patterns of behavior that impact students' and educators' abilities to reach their hopes and dreams. It is natural to drift in and out of all four quadrants over time. No one can live in the land of *Aspiration* all the time; they would likely hit a point of exhaustion and burnout.

Today's educational system can help everyone become dreamers *and* doers. Schools, classrooms, and co-curricular programs must ensure that everyone has the self-worth to succeed, is engaged in the learning process, and has a sense of purpose—not only to make a difference in their own lives, but in the world, as well. Teachers and students need to identify where they currently are on their journeys to achieving their aspirations. They must determine which quadrant they find themselves in the majority of the time and strive toward a balance of dreaming and doing—dreaming about the future and being inspired in the present to work hard to reach one's fullest potential. Establishing a consistent presence in the *Aspiration* quadrant will not only help teachers and students achieve their dreams, but will translate into inspiring and supporting their peers.