

“I became a teacher because I am passionate about standardized testing!” This sentiment has been expressed by NO teacher ... EVER! Teachers enter the education profession because they want to make a difference in the lives of students. They typically love learning and want to guide the learning journey of young people. Yes, we want students to be successful, and we more than understand that student achievement is the end game. However, when talking about our ultimate purpose as teachers, it is important to consider the many factors that contribute to students “achieving”, and the impact teacher voice has on student achievement.



Numerous studies have proven the powerful impact of teacher perceptions and self-efficacy on student motivation to learn (Hattie, 2012, Dweck, Walton, & Coehn, 2014, Quaglia & Corso, 2014). “When teachers have a high sense of self-efficacy they are more creative in their work, intensify their efforts when their performances fall short of their goals and persist longer. Teachers’ sense of self-efficacy can thus influence the learning and motivation of students, even if students are unmotivated or considered difficult” (Bangs & Frost, 2012, p.3). Teachers with Purpose, who believe they can make a difference, have a significant impact on student motivation to learn—leading to a direct impact on the end game of student achievement.

It is interesting to explore teacher perceptions of the term “leadership”. Leadership is so much more than being “the person in charge” or the person most comfortable speaking up. While leadership opportunities are inherent in certain positions, the position itself is not leadership; it is what the person does with those opportunities that brings about leadership. And even without official organizational leadership titles, teachers and students can (and must!) be leaders. Leadership is not a title or position—it is an action, and voice is an integral part of producing results.

Leadership stereotypes appear present in schools (QISVA, 2019):

- 64% of students agreed with the statement “I see myself as a leader.”
- 36% of students agree that “Other students see me as a leader.”

This data was somewhat surprising, as we have heard students articulate incredible ideas for better schedules, more efficient lunch lines, and innovative grading policies. Yet, they do not see their ideas as worthy of leadership. Focus group data may reveal why. We often hear students say, “I have great ideas, but no one will listen to me,” and students often explain that they do not believe teachers are willing to learn from them. It may be difficult to imagine yourself as a leader if you don’t think your voice is heard and valued. Everyone needs to challenge the traditional view of leadership in schools. There should be no ranking in leadership when it comes to deciding how to improve the learning environment—I am not above you and you are not below me. True leadership involves listening to, learning from, and leading with others, with a shared goal and a commitment to take action together.

Schools that effectively foster leadership place a great deal of trust in the individuals within the system. Teaching, modeling, and supporting good decision making for students is an important part of the learning experience. This includes recognizing individuals for decisions that result in success, and supporting students when poor decisions are made or a decision originally deemed to be good does not result in the desired outcome.

Our system needs to move from being obsessed with testing and accountability to one of trust and responsibility. When mutual trust exists and teachers are given ownership for the achievement of their students, they become responsible to themselves, rather than accountable to someone else. Individual ownership for the achievement of one's students is present when teachers have voice and are able to meaningfully collaborate and continually improve upon individual and collective practice in a safe environment. Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012) call this the social capital of a school, or the ways that teachers work collaboratively around student learning, student engagement, and increased student achievement. When the social capital of a school is high and a culture of trust and responsibility exists, teacher voice will thrive and consistently make a difference in the academic growth of students.

References

- Bangs, J. and Frost D. (2012). *Teacher self-efficacy, voice and leadership: Towards a policy framework for education international*. Education International Research Institute.
- Dweck, C., Walton, G., and Coehn, G. (2014). *Academic tenacity: Mindsets and skills that promote long-term learning*. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning inside: Maximizing student achievement*. London: Routledge.
- Quaglia Institute for School Voice & Aspirations. (2019). *Student voice: A decade of data*. Retrieved from https://quagliainstitute.org/uploads/legacy/Student_Voice_Grades_6-12_Decade_of_Data_Report.pdf
- Quaglia, R. J., & Corso, M. (2014). *Student voice: The instrument of change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.