

As educators and policymakers strive for all participants to reach their academic and professional promise, they must ask:

How can students meet high academic standards if they do not believe in their own ability to do so? How can they learn if they are not academically engaged? How can they set and reach academic goals if they do not see a purpose in doing so? If students are to enjoy academic, social, and personal success, they must believe in themselves, be actively engaged in their learning, and see the connection between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow.

The Quaglia Institute for School Voice and Aspirations (QISVA) is committed to helping schools foster student and teacher aspirations so that all can reach their fullest potential. When students and teachers have high aspirations, they have the *ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams*. QISVA believes that for students and teachers to achieve high aspirations, 3 Guiding Principles must be present: Self-Worth, Engagement, and Purpose.

The Guiding Principles provide educators with a practical model that can be used to guide professional and educational experiences, from the individual classroom to the entire school district. If school curriculum, activities, classroom lessons, professional development, goal setting, and evaluation support each of the Guiding Principles, teachers and students will be more likely to achieve academic, personal, and social success. The 3 Guiding Principles are:

1. SELF-WORTH

Self-Worth flourishes when students and staff know they are valued members of the school community, have people in their lives they can trust and learn from, believe they have the ability to achieve, and know their efforts and hard work are recognized and celebrated in a variety of ways—academically, personally, and socially.

When students believe they have a voice they are **32%** more likely to report having **Self-Worth**.

2. ENGAGEMENT

Engagement takes root when schools ensure that students and staff are deeply involved in the learning process, showing enthusiasm and a desire to learn new things, as well as a willingness to take positive, healthy steps toward the future.

When students believe they have a voice they are **38%** more likely to report **Engagement**.

3. PURPOSE

Purpose in school is fostered when students and staff take responsibility for who and what they want to become, both in terms of professional careers and by being confident, responsible members of their community.

When students believe they have a voice they are **43%** more likely to report having **Purpose**.

Stakeholders can support the 3 Guiding Principles by:

Helping Students and Teachers Develop Self-Worth

Both students and teachers must experience a sense of *Belonging*. They should feel that they are part of the school community while being recognized, appreciated, and celebrated for their uniqueness. Students and teachers experience Self-Worth when someone believes in them and tells them so. They must have *Heroes*—people they can look up to, respect, and learn from. Finally, to develop Self-Worth, teachers and students must experience a *Sense of Accomplishment*. They must be recognized as much for effort, perseverance, citizenship, and positive collegiality as students are for high grades and good test scores, and as teachers are for engendering high student achievement results. With Self-Worth, students and teachers are more likely to persevere through difficult tasks and take the steps needed to reach their goals.

Fostering Students' and Teachers' Engagement in Learning

The participation gap will decrease when students and teachers experience *Fun & Excitement* in the learning environment. Imagine a lesson or professional development session when students and teachers wonder at the end, “Where did that time go?” Students and teachers who are actively engaged in their school and learning also exhibit *Curiosity & Creativity*. They ask “Why?” or “Why not?” about the world around them, about curriculum, policies, procedures, norms, and customs. Finally, engaged students and teachers have a *Spirit of Adventure*. They are willing to try new things, regardless of whether they might succeed or fail. With Engagement, learning—and therefore participation in learning—becomes important in and of itself.

Encouraging a Sense of Purpose

Far too many students do not see a connection between their school experience and who they are or who they want to become. Too many teachers have lost a connection between the daily school experience and who they are as educators. Schools must think seriously about the traits that characterize a successful school and how achievement is recognized and rewarded. Schools must balance the call for improved academic performance with myriad other factors that impact preparing students for success beyond graduation. Schools must also challenge students to think about the characteristics that accompany successful and rewarding work. A sense of Purpose involves developing students' and teachers' sense of *Leadership & Responsibility*. Students and teachers must participate in meaningful decision making and be provided with authentic opportunities to share in the responsibility for the school community. When students and teachers find purpose in their lives, they will have the *Confidence to Take Action* in order to secure a meaningful, productive, and rewarding future.

Concluding Thoughts

When schools ensure the Guiding Principles of Self-Worth, Engagement, and Purpose are in place, students and teachers are more likely to achieve high aspirations. Students with high aspirations show marked improvements in academic achievement and social awareness, and teachers show improvements in professional performance and collegiality. When the 3 Guiding Principles are fostered, all participants are more invested in making positive contributions to their school community.

When all students believe in themselves, are engaged in their learning, and understand that what they learn today influences who they will become tomorrow, and when all teachers believe in themselves, are engaged in the school, and experience meaning and purpose in their work—only then can the larger goal of helping teachers and students reach their fullest capacity finally be met.