

THE ASPIRATIONS PROFILE

What accounts for the difference between a student who talks about goals and one who actually reaches them? What makes the difference between a student who works hard at every day tasks and one whose hard work leads to a promising future? The difference is in the student's aspirations—his or her *ability to set goals and think about the future while being inspired in the present to reach those goals*. As the definition suggests, there are essentially two pieces of the aspirations puzzle: dreaming and doing.

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) believes that today's schools need to foster student aspirations by encouraging students to be both dreamers and doers. This is easier said than done, since students 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. It is only when students *dream and do* that they are able to reach their fullest potential.

The Aspirations Profile

In order to help schools and educators foster student aspirations, QISA has developed The Aspirations Profile which presents a visual model of the behaviors that support and hinder success. The Aspirations Profile has two dimensions: Dreamers and Doers. Within the dimensions are four categories: *Hibernation, Perspiration, Imagination and Determination*. These categories help us better understand the specific challenges of fostering aspirations with different students.

Aspirations Profile

	High	<p>Imagination Sets goals for the future but does not put forth the effort to reach those goals</p>	<p>Determination Sets goals for future and puts forth effort in the present to reach those goals</p>
Dreamers		<p>Hibernation Has no goals for the future and puts in no effort in the present</p>	<p>Perspiration Works hard in the present, but has no goals for the future</p>
	Low	Low	High
		Doers	

CATEGORY 1: 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 from others, have low self-esteem, lack a positive role model, and feel stuck. These students are labeled—sometimes unfairly—as lazy, trouble makers, drifters, loners. They are characterized as students who just don't care about anything...including themselves.

Students in the *Hibernation* category lack a sense of purpose about themselves and rarely experience a sense of accomplishment in anything they do. For these students to move out of this state 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 to have a hero in their life, someone they 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 direction and or motivation to reach their fullest potential.

CATEGORY 2: PERSPIRATION

Perspiration is the category which defines someone who works exceptionally hard, always puts forth effort, but lacks any kind of direction or purpose. This can be seen in students who show up on time, seem to always be at school, put forth the effort necessary to get ahead, but lack any kind of dreams for the future. Thus they are working hard every day, yet seem to be going nowhere. These students are labeled as hard-working, diligent, but directionless; they often stay out of trouble but see no real future in front of them.

There tends to be fewer students in the *Perspiration* category than in any other category of the Aspirations Profile. The challenges these students face can be dealt with relatively easily. Students in the *Perspiration* category 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. It is important that these students gain a sense of accomplishment and can see the direct implications of their hard work and effort toward some future goal. Students in the *Perspiration* category must also be taught how to set goals and why goals are important for people to achieve to 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 that their hard work and effort can have a great impact on their future.

CATEGORY 3: IMAGINATION

The category of *Imagination* is characterized by those students who can readily say what they want to be and share their future plans, but who show little if any effort to reach those dreams. They have positive ideas and attitudes about their future, but they don't take the steps in the present that are needed to reach their goals. It is easy for these students to tell us what we want to hear about their future...they will tell us they are going to college, want to be doctors, teachers, or house builders, 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, idle and privileged. *Imagination*

students can be the most pleasant students to be around, but when it comes to getting something done they don't follow through.

Students in the *Imagination* category do not need to be motivated when it comes to thinking about their future. Instead, they need to be motivated in the present to get the work done necessary to reach their goals. It is important to help them find fun and excitement in their everyday school lives so that they connect to the daily aspects of their hopes and dreams. It is critical to make sure they have an environment in which they are challenged to be curious and creative so that they see the ties between learning and the world around them, including their future. Ultimately, *imagination* students need to be encouraged to have a spirit of adventure. They must be challenged to step outside of their comfort zone and have the confidence to take action in the real world. They need to learn that it is okay to try something new—regardless of whether the outcome is success or failure. They need to take responsibility for their dreams and make them real...today.

CATEGORY 4: DETERMINATION

Students in the *Determination* category have high aspirations. They have the ability to think about the future and set goals for themselves. They also are inspired in the present to work toward those goals. These students are the hard working, dependable ones that seem to be always moving forward with a sense of purpose. They have a clear intention about what they want to do, who they want to become and they have committed the energy, time and resources to meet their objectives. They have a sense of direction and, even if the direction changes, they are well equipped to meet the challenges of the day and continue to pursue their dreams. Students with *determination* 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 *Determination* category need to be guided and supported in their pursuit of their goals. They need to be given challenges and recognized for their effort and perseverance. Their successes need to be celebrated. *Determination* 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.

Concluding Thoughts

Understanding the dynamics of student aspirations is a complex endeavor. The Aspirations Profile is designed to provide a simple framework for understanding the patterns of behavior that impact students' ability to reach their hopes and dreams. If educators have a clearer sense of where students fit into the Aspirations Profile, they may find it easier to provide opportunities that help students reach their fullest potential. Today's educational system *can* help all students become dreamers and doers. Educators can help all students strive for, and reach, the *Determination* category. Schools, classrooms, and co-curricular programs must ensure that every student has the self-worth to succeed, is actively engaged in the learning process, and has a sense of purpose not only to make a difference in their own life, but in the world around them.