

WHITE MOUNTAINS REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL: A SCHOOL MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) works with schools throughout the world in various ways. The most focused and concentrated of QISA's efforts are three-year school partnerships known as Demonstration Sites. White Mountains Regional High School (WMRHS) in Whitefield, New Hampshire is in the third year of its Demonstration Site partnership with QISA.

WMRHS is set amid the picturesque White Mountains of northern New Hampshire. The area is a community of proud, industrious, and resourceful people. Concerned about the flagging aspirations of their students, "The Regional" became a Demonstration Site after a near unanimous vote of the staff to bring Dr. Quaglia's work into the school. QISA's My Voice® Survey, given at the start of the project, indicated:

- Just 22% of students said they were proud of their school
- Only 60% of seniors said that school was a welcoming and friendly place
- A steady decrease from freshmen (57%) to sophomores (46%) to juniors (36%) to seniors (28%) in agreement with the statement "My parents like my school."

At the start of the project, staff worked on improving students' perceptions that teachers cared about and respected each student. QISA's approach—which combines short-term, personal commitments to do something differently today with long-term changes to policies, procedures, norms, and customs—began by inviting teachers to consider what they might do to affect a positive change in their interactions with students*. Teachers began greeting students at the door as they entered the classroom, visiting the cafeteria when not on duty, attending more sporting events, and discovering what students were accomplishing outside of academics (e.g., hacky-sack, ballet, ox-driving!).

At the same time, an Aspirations Team composed of administrators, classroom teachers, guidance, and the school nurse began examining the school through the lens of QISA's 8 Conditions, asking questions like: Which of our systems promote Belonging? Which policies get in the way of teachers being Heroes to students? What might we do to better celebrate all the accomplishments of all students and staff? As a result of that analysis, the team adopted several aspirations related projects: improving communication through better use of email, the school website, and bulletin boards; increased teacher leadership through monthly *ad hoc* committees that study various topics as they arise; changes to the

* A key to QISA's approach is that these initiatives were developed by the teachers at WMRHS, not imposed out of an Aspirations playbook.

master schedule to allow for more student choice and the creation of a common study period at the end of each day; and the development of a parent/community resource binder to create closer ties between the school and the surrounding community. Additionally, a team of students has worked on improving the nutritional value of cafeteria food, increasing school spirit, and developing better respect for diversity. QISA's student teams are as much about instilling in students the confidence to take action as about the particular changes themselves. That the protein content of school lunches at WMRHS has improved is second to the fact that students doing research, making presentations to the school board, and following up with cafeteria staff brought about this change. This "Dream Team" has become a model of student leadership in the school.

According to Principal Ryan Early, Aspirations work has impacted all areas of school life: *We have had "amazing results with regard to teacher voice, student voice and parent voice. [It has impacted] student government, student rep to school board, parent forums, new co-curricular offerings, increased committee participation, and the hiring process. Turn-over of staff has decreased, teacher advisors have increased, school pride has improved, student discipline has improved, new programming has been allowed, there has been a shift in the purpose of faculty meetings, parent groups have been created, transition plans have been effected, and much more. [Personally,] I intrinsically think about how every decision I make is linked and rooted in the 8 Conditions."*

These combined short and long term efforts of administration, staff, and students have had the following measurable results after just two and a half years:

- 43% of students now report feeling proud of their school, including a near doubling of the number of males agreeing with the statement, from 26% in the first year to over half (53%) in the third year.
- 81% of the seniors in the follow-up survey report that school is a welcoming and friendly place. This is a 21% increase over how the senior class felt at the beginning of the project and a 27% increase in this particular group of students (who were sophomores at the beginning of the project). Where the trend in this indicator had been declining from grade to grade it is now improving from grade to grade.
- 57% of students now report that their parents like their school. An increase of 14%. Moreover, the trend has leveled off from grade to grade with agreement among seniors nearly doubling from 28% in year one to 52% in year three.

When a schools climate begins to change in a way that improves student aspirations, students are not the only ones to benefit. The following is a sampling of results to the My Voice® Staff Survey given in the first and third year of the project.

TOTAL IN AGREEMENT	2005-2006	2007-2008	percent change
School is a welcoming and friendly place.	53%	91%	+38%
I am proud of my school.	73%	89%	+16%
Students respect me.	73%	88%	+15%
Our school celebrates the accomplishments of the staff.	36%	64%	+28%
At school I am encouraged to be creative.	62%	87%	+25%
I am involved in school-wide decisions.	27%	58%	+31%

While these results represent just a sampling of changes and while there is still room to grow, it is clear the WMRHS is a school that is moving in a positive direction to improve student aspirations. Students and staff are becoming full partners in education in order to develop the self-worth, active engagement, and sense of purpose of all participants.

School Profile

Principal:	Ryan Early		
Assistant Principal:	Dr. Frank Mellaci		
Career & Tech Ed Director:	Mrs. Lori Lane		
Number of Students:	501		
Free and Reduced Lunch:	26%		
Web-site:	www.sau36.org/WMRHS		
Aspirations Team:	Laurie Carr	Lori Spencer	Heather Parker
	Moira Bundschuh	Andrea Roy	Lisa Harold
	Jeff Woodburn	Patsy Ainsworth	Peggy Dubois
	Mark Saffian	Jon Dugan-Henriksen	Jennifer Barton