

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As educators and policy makers strive for all students to reach their academic promise, they must ask: How can students meet high academic standards if they don't believe in their ability to do so? How can they learn if they aren't academically engaged? How can they set and reach academic goals if they don't see the 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. When these experiences are absent, aspirations flounder and achievement declines.

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) is committed to helping schools foster student aspirations so that all students reach their fullest potential. When students have high aspirations, they have the *ability to set goals and think about the future while being inspired in the present to reach those goals*. QISA believes that for students to have high aspirations Three Guiding Principles must be present: *Self-Worth*, *Active Engagement*, and *Purpose*.

Guiding Principles

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

The Guiding Principles are:

1. *Self-Worth*: Self-Worth occurs when students know they are valued members of the school community; have a person in their lives they can trust and learn from; and believe they have the ability to achieve-- academically, personally and socially.
2. *Active Engagement*: Active Engagement happens when students are deeply involved in the learning process as characterized by enthusiasm and desire to learn new things and a willingness to take positive, healthy steps toward the future.
3. *Purpose*: Purpose exists when students take responsibility for who and what they want to become, in terms not only of professional careers but by being confident, responsible members of their community.

Recent data collected by QISA reveals that not all students experience *Self-Worth*, *Active Engagement*, and *Purpose* in their schools:

**Sampling of Findings from the *My Voice*© Student Aspirations Survey
Grades 6-12 (n~500,000)**

<p>What students are saying about <i>Self-Worth</i></p>	<p>Teachers care about me as an individual: 45%</p> <p>Teachers respect students: 51%</p> <p>Teachers care if I am absent from school: 49%</p> <p>I have never been recognized for something positive at school: 21%</p>
<p>What students are saying about <i>Active-Engagement</i></p>	<p>School is boring: 46%</p> <p>My classes help me understand what is happening in my everyday life: 40%</p> <p>Teachers make school an exciting place to learn: 32%</p> <p>At school I am encouraged to be creative: 53%</p>
<p>What students are saying about <i>Purpose</i></p>	<p>I know the goals my school is working on: 37%</p> <p>Students council represents all students at school: 34%</p> <p>I believe I can make a difference in this world: 63%</p> <p>I put forth my best effort at school: 67%</p>

How Educators Can Support the Guiding Principles

HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP A SENSE OF SELF-WORTH.

For students to increase their participation in the learning process, they must experience a sense of belonging. They must feel that they are part of the school community while being recognized, appreciated, and celebrated for their uniqueness. Students also experience self-worth when someone in their life believes in them. They must have a hero, someone they can look up to, respect, and learn from. Finally, to develop self-worth, students must experience a sense of accomplishment. They must be recognized as much for effort, perseverance and citizenship as they are for high grades and good test scores. With self-worth students are more likely to persevere through difficult tasks and take the steps needed to reach their goals.

FOSTER STUDENTS' ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING.

The participation gap will also lessen when students experience fun and excitement in their learning environment. Active engagement means that students become so involved in their own learning they lose track of time and space. At the end of a lesson they wonder, "Where did that time go?" Students who are actively engaged in their learning are also curious and creative. They ask "Why?" or "Why not?" about the world around them. Finally, engaged students have a spirit of adventure. They are not afraid to try new things, regardless of whether they might succeed or fail. With active engagement, learning—and therefore participation in learning—becomes important in and of itself.

ENCOURAGE A SENSE OF PURPOSE.

Far too many students see no connection between school and who they are or who they want to become. In an effort to counter this trend, educators attempt to draw links between today's learning and tomorrow's careers, encouraging students to think about their education as tied to what type of job they want to one day hold. There is more to the picture, however. Schools must challenge students to think about the characteristics that accompany successful and rewarding work. They must encourage students to think about *who* they want to become as well as *what* they want to be. A sense of purpose involves developing students' sense of accountability and confidence. Students must have leadership roles in schools that carry genuine responsibility for themselves and others. When students 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--*Self-Worth*, *Active Engagement*, and *Purpose*—are in place, students are more likely to have high aspirations. Students with high aspirations show marked improvements in academic achievement, social awareness and positive contributions to their school community. When all students believe in themselves, are actively engaged in their learning, and understand that what they learn today influences who they will become tomorrow—only then will the larger goal of helping students reach their fullest potential finally be met.