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# Current Conditions

## Your Aspiration Communication

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“I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?”  
--Benjamin Disraeli



Leaders are typically thought of as people who have vision and voice. They have a clear picture of where they want to go and effectively communicate that to their followers. Yet leadership is also about looking and listening. Responsible leaders seek multiple perspectives and hear out diverse opinions. The challenge is creating a shared vision from multiple viewpoints and speaking in a voice that harmonizes the voices of the entire community. We invite you to consider how you are modeling and teaching this more responsible form of leadership to your students.

### **CONDITION OF THE MONTH: LEADERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY**

Expressing ideas, listening to others, and accepting consequences for one's actions.

#### 5 Strategies for Promoting Leadership & Responsibility

- Teach and practice listening skills to all students, not just student leaders.
- Help students understand the values that drive their decisions.
- Create diverse teams of students to work together on class projects.
- Challenge students to understand perspectives different than their own.
- Invite a community leader to share with students the challenges of listening.

#### 2007 My Voice© Staff Survey

##### **For Consideration and Conversation**

On the *My Voice© Staff Survey* (n=15,650), less than half (47%) of staff agreed with the statement : "We communicate effectively in our building." Two out of three (67%) staff reported that they feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.

- ◆ How do you practice effective communication with your colleagues as well as with students?
- ◆ What strategies do you use to create a collegial environment where diverse opinions are valued?

*E-mail your Leadership & Responsibility stories, thoughts, or ideas to [qisa@qisa.org](mailto:qisa@qisa.org)*

# ASPIRATIONS IN ACTION

## Lessons in Leadership



Each year the National Catholic Center for Student Aspirations (NCCSA) at Assumption College hosts leadership conferences for middle school students. Over 250 students attend the conferences annually, spending a day with trained college students to explore three facets of leadership: speaking & listening, clarifying values, and team building. Diverse teams of students are created from all attending schools. Throughout the day teams are given unique challenges

designed to heighten their leadership thinking and stimulate their decision-making skills.

In the final hour of the conference, students and chaperones work in school groups to identify an attainable goal to improve their school community. Groups write up step-by-step action plans and time frames on large pieces of newsprint, which are then rolled up and carried back to the schools to guide the group's work.

Last month NCCSA held a leadership conference at Boston College. A survey of the room in the final hour revealed:

- In some school groups, the chaperone/teacher had picked up the marker and was writing down the group's ideas.
- In others, a student had picked up the marker to do the work for his/her school.
- In still others, a student asked her teacher for the marker, and quite naturally, the teacher handed it over to her.

It seems these three scenarios tell a larger story about leadership in our schools today.

Most schools have different and familiar leadership opportunities for students: Student council, National Honors Society, team captains, club president, etc. Though some students thrive in these roles, many positions do not guarantee students are gaining meaningful experiences as leaders. Students holding these positions often do not participate in any school-wide decision-making, their opinions are not sought by administrators in matters that concern them, and frequently, teachers pick up the slack when the student leaders are unable to complete a project by a deadline. Like the students whose teachers are holding the marker for them, these students are not being fully empowered.

Research being done by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) shows that, in order to foster the condition of Leadership & Responsibility, schools must provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students need to be trusted to make the right decisions and be supported and educated when they do not. Schools demonstrating this level of student leadership are places where students pick up the marker and get to work.

Are your students asking you for the marker? Students naturally want to have some say in the things that affect them and their learning. Every day in your classrooms and hallways, you have the opportunity to give them this chance, to solicit their ideas, or hand them some decision-making power. We need to provide students with genuine leadership opportunities in order for them to experience the character-building lessons of leadership that will result in their life-long success.



Submitted By Kristin Melley, Director; National Catholic Center for Student Aspirations at Assumption College  
The NCCSA is an affiliate of QISA and is operated by Assumption College in Worcester, MA. Visit our website at [www.assumption.edu/nccsa](http://www.assumption.edu/nccsa).