
Current Conditions

Your Aspiration Communication

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”
~Anne Frank

Making a difference may mean finding a cure for cancer or negotiating a peace between warring nations. Making a difference may also mean encouraging a student who is struggling with a biology lesson or helping colleagues see both sides of a divisive issue. Modeling with confidence that your actions as an educator are making a difference, whether world-shaking or more humble, will help students learn they can make a difference, too. Each positive action each one of us takes improves the world no matter the degree. The student we encourage in biology may go on to cure cancer or to motivate another generation of students or may simply go on to have a better day—all make a world of difference.



CONDITION OF THE MONTH: CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

Believing in your ability to make a difference.

5 Strategies for Promoting Confidence to Take Action

- Incorporate community service into your lessons.
- Connect students' talents with opportunities around them to make a difference.
- Support students who do not believe in their abilities by highlighting positive changes they have already made.
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate rather than compete.
- Discuss with students their post-secondary plans.

In the My Voice[®] Student Survey conducted by QISA, 9 out of 10 (91%) of students agreed with the statement “I believe I can be successful.” 63% agreed that “I believe I can make a difference in this world.”

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- ◆ What accounts for the difference between students' perceptions of their ability to be successful and to make a difference in the world?
- ◆ How do you demonstrate your belief that your students can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others?

E-mail your Confidence to Take Action stories, thoughts, or ideas to qisa@qisa.org

Aspirations in Action

May I Go Outside Month

At the John F. Kennedy Elementary School in Somerville, Massachusetts, members of the Aspirations Team are challenging their colleagues to “take it outside.” The project is a simple one based on the belief that bringing students outside for learning (weather permitting) will help improve student participation, engagement, motivation, and so, learning.

Focus groups with students reveal that traditional teaching—indoors, in seats, in rows, in silence—is part of what contributes to students saying they are bored in school. In a national survey of middle school students using the My Voice© Survey, while 61% of students agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun," 42% agreed with the statement "School is boring."

Some would argue that the outdoors is too distracting for learning to take place. This may be true, especially if being outside is a novelty. However, if students are consistently expected to learn outside, distractions can fade away and the outdoors can become a natural extension of the classroom environment.

It should be noted that the Kennedy School is in an urban setting and that the Aspirations Team is not suggesting their colleagues spend the month of May organizing field trips. The team identified two areas outside the school, one of which has a playground, created a schedule for use that worked around recess and lunch time use of those two areas, and posted a calendar in a central location for teachers to sign out the spaces. They invited teachers to adapt a lesson they would normally teach



inside for outside. For a math lesson that would have students counting jelly beans at their desks, they suggested bringing students outside to count fallen leaves or links in a swing’s chain. More advanced students could multiply the links by the number of chains to find out how many links are in the entire set. For a lesson on adjectives that would normally be brainstorming on a piece of paper, they suggested brainstorming all the adjectives that describe the cars parked along the street. The goal is not just to move outside (e.g., read a book on the lawn instead of on the carpet), but rather to integrate the outside into the lesson. Teachers will be looking ahead to upcoming lesson plans to find the lessons that are best suited to this form of integration.

Look for results in future editions of Current Conditions!