



***My Voice* 6-12 Student National Report 2010**

Executive Summary

Students who have aspirations have *the ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams*. The presence of high aspirations is fostered by the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference®: *Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action*. These Conditions provide an organizing structure for the report.

The *My Voice*™ Student Aspirations Survey assesses various aspects of student aspirations by asking students to respond to 63 statements about the 8 Conditions, as well as a set of demographic questions. For the present report, the *My Voice* survey was completed by 19,444 students in grades 6-12 during the spring of 2010. Forty-three schools from six different states (from the South, Midwest, and Northeast regions of the United States) representing various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds were included.

Results show that while there are some positive signs, the overall picture suggests our schools are by and large failing to provide optimal environments in which students might reach their full aspirational potential. For the Condition of Belonging, we found some points of encouragement; for example, nearly three-quarters of students report feeling accepted for who they are at school and a relatively small proportion (17%) say that have difficulty fitting in at school (numbers that, we believe, nonetheless should be better). However, the greater theme for Belonging was one of disconnection; less than half of students think their teachers care about their problems and feelings, feel they are a valued member of the school community, or are proud of their school.

Student reporting regarding the Heroes Condition looked similar; only about half of students believe their teachers care about them as individuals or care if they are absent from school, or have a teacher with whom they can talk if they have a problem. Respect among students and teachers in the school setting is generally lacking. On the positive side, about three-quarters of students have a teacher who is a positive role model, and the vast majority of students feel their parents care about their education.

Results around Sense of Accomplishment are somewhat more promising, though there is plenty of room for improvement. Encouragement of citizenship and teacher recognition of students who are kind and helpful are reported by three-quarters of students. And roughly nine in ten students believe getting good grades is important to them. Despite this, a notably lower percentage of students (72%) actually put forth their best effort in school, and even fewer (62%) feel that their teachers recognize them when they do. Nearly one in five give up when they encounter difficult schoolwork.

Student reports of experiencing Fun & Excitement in school are, in general, quite discouraging. Less than half of students enjoy being at school. Only slightly above one-third think their teachers make school an exciting place to learn. Roughly half think school is boring. At the same time, seven in ten believe learning *can* be fun. It would seem that schools simply aren't doing a good job of making it so.

The results for Curiosity & Creativity are more positive, though again they point to needed improvements. Roughly three-quarters of students report enjoying learning new things, feel that what they learn in school will benefit their future, and say their teachers present lessons in different ways; about seven in ten report learning new things in school that are interesting to them. At the same time, only two-thirds report creativity being encouraged in school, and even fewer (59%) feel inspired to learn in school. Barely four in ten feel their classes help them understand what is happening in their everyday lives.

Similar ups and downs are evident in the responses indicating Spirit of Adventure. On the upside, at least eight in ten students report pushing themselves to do better academically and a desire to do their best in school. On the downside, most students do not report liking challenging assignments, or feel that students are supportive of each other in their school. Approximately one-quarter of all students are reluctant to challenge themselves because they are afraid they might fail. And in the cases that they may make mistakes, less than two-thirds of students feel their teachers will help them learn from them.

Results for Leadership & Responsibility show that while most students are relatively confident in their leadership skills (roughly two-thirds see themselves as leaders and good decision makers), their impressions of the school environment suggest they are not given opportunities to actualize them. Indeed, just over one in three feels that other students see them as leaders. Moreover, less than half of students feel they have a voice in decision making at school or believe that teachers are willing to learn from students.

Perhaps the most encouraging of the Conditions results are for Confidence to Take Action. Clear majorities (at least eight in ten) of students report high goal-striving and confidence in their ability to be successful, along with some sense of the kind of person they want to become. Fewer, but still reasonably high numbers of students report teachers believing in them and expecting them to be successful (74%). Still, only about two-thirds of students report confidence they can make a difference in the world and that school is preparing them well for their futures, which certainly leaves room for improvement.

Beyond reporting on the Conditions, the results were broken down by male vs. female, and middle school vs. high school. On the whole, there are few gender differences of note. Females typically report higher effort and goal-striving, and greater enjoyment of being at school. Similarly, the differences between students' reports in middle school and high school are relatively small; those that do exist suggest that students in middle school put in more effort and are more likely to feel school is preparing them well for their futures, and that teachers communicate more with their parents. Additionally, bullying is reported to be more of a problem in middle school than high school.

Overall, we find the results of the 2010 *My Voice* 6-12 Student National Report in places rather encouraging, and in others quite disheartening. In general, students report relatively high levels of confidence in themselves, interest in learning, and desire to set and achieve their goals. At the same time, their perceptions of the school conditions that might foster their aspirations instead suggest fairly high levels of boredom and disengagement, a relative lack of relevance of school to their daily lives, generally low levels of respect among teachers and students, and at best mixed impressions of the supportiveness of their teachers. Taken together, students' general self-confidence and desire to achieve coupled with schools' general failure to engage and support them is a recipe for reduced performance, dropout, and ultimately a squandering of the full potential of our youth. If schools are to be places in which teaching and learning thrive, this must change. Listening to the voices of students is the first step.