

## I. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

There are three key components to the administration's efforts to improve education by establishing a firm educational foundation in the earliest years of a child's life.

1. **Zero to Five Plan:** Place key emphasis at early care and education for infants. Create Early Learning Challenge Grants to promote state Zero to Five efforts and help states move toward voluntary, universal preschool.
2. **Expand Early Head Start and Head Start:** Quadruple Early Head Start, increase Head Start funding, and improve quality of both.
3. **Provide affordable, high quality child care:** Increase access to affordable and high quality care to ease the burden on working families.

Numerous studies have shown the importance of early childhood education on later success in school and, in particular, on school retention. A recent study\* by Dr. W. Steven Barnett lists among its recommendations that:

- Teachers in preschool programs should receive intensive supervision and coaching, and they should be involved in a continuous improvement process for teaching and learning.
- Preschool programs should regularly assess children's learning and development in order to monitor how well they are accomplishing their goals.
- Preschool programs, in order to produce positive effects on children's behavior and later reductions in crime and delinquency, should be designed to develop the whole child, including social and emotional development and self-regulation.

The success of preschool programs depends both on the programs themselves being of high quality, and on the ability of the programs to form positive links between home and school. A child's first experience of learning in a school-like setting must be a positive experience for both him or her and for that child's parents.

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\* Barnett, W. Steven, Ph.D. (2008) *Preschool Education and Its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications*. National Institute for Early Education Research. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.



## THE QUAGLIA INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ASPIRATIONS RESPONSE

If children are to enjoy success during school and later in life, they must begin their participation in school with experiences designed to promote their self-worth, foster their active engagement in the learning process, and nurture a growing sense of confidence in their own abilities. These efforts are significantly enhanced when early child care providers and parents share a common language and set of goals for the child's development. The 8 Conditions establish a framework for providers and parents to ensure that both school and home experiences plant the seeds for high aspirations.

QISA will offer a statewide conference for early education specialists and providers that consists of:

- A keynote address by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, the founder and president of the Quaglia Institute and the leading educator in the field of student aspirations.
- Breakout workshops for early education specialists, with a particular emphasis on developing school-home relationships.
- Opportunities for networking with other early child care providers to discuss best practices.
- An action planning session.

The early education conference will include a deeper understanding of the 8 Conditions as they relate to children from birth to age five, along with strategies for educating parents about the importance of the 8 Conditions for effective parenting. Participants will receive an *Early Childhood Aspirations Resource Book* focused on students age four to six that includes a teacher guide, a parent section, and a coloring book - "A is for Aspirations" - designed to promote the 8 Conditions in young children. Participants will also receive online access to other Aspirations resources, research, and networks.

## II. STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

The current administration's contribution to the effort to track student and school success includes four major initiatives:

1. **Reforming No Child Left Behind:** Refine the assessments used to track student progress and NCLB's accountability system so that we are supporting schools that need improvement, rather than punishing them.
2. **Addressing the Dropout Crisis:** Provide funding to school districts to invest in intervention strategies in middle school, such as personal academic plans, teaching teams, parent involvement, mentoring, intensive reading and math instruction, and extended learning time.
3. **Supporting English Language Learners:** Hold schools accountable for making sure these students enjoy success in school.
4. **Improving Assistance to Students with Disabilities:** Ensure the academic success of students with disabilities by increasing funding and effectively enforcing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and by holding schools accountable for providing students with disabilities the services and supports they need to reach their potential.

The effort to measure success and to hold schools accountable for their efforts has been one of the most controversial elements of the educational reform movement. While few educators dispute the importance of accountability to sustained progress, *how* we quantify a school's effectiveness is the subject of debate. The variety of approaches at the state level, and the diversity and number of metrics available, is itself an indication of the complexities involved. In light of the debate, the president's plan has the advantage of focusing on three elements with which most educators agree:

- NCLB needs revision. As written, the law has created a high stakes atmosphere in schools that often works against the best interest of students.
- Dropout prevention must be a priority. The evidence of the undesirable consequences to individuals and society of dropping out is overwhelming.<sup>†</sup>
- Current systems of accountability do not adequately address the challenges of assessing and improving the progress of students for whom English is a second language, or for students who have disabilities.

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<sup>†</sup> See for example: *Too Big To Be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America*. A Report from the Boston Youth Transitions Task Force (2006).



## THE QUAGLIA INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ASPIRATIONS RESPONSE

“We do a great job asking students what they know in school. We need to do a much better job of asking students what they think and believe about their school.”

– Dr. Russell J. Quaglia

The present federal educational policy places a narrow emphasis on academic proficiency as measured on standardized tests. Along with retention, these have become the sole measures of what counts as success for schools. While “adequate yearly progress” in academic achievement should be a desired outcome for every school and student, the current effort falls short on four accounts:

- It is too constrictive given the actual breadth of outcomes schools achieve.
- It runs counter to calls that schools must educate the “whole child.”
- It does not recognize or ask schools to be accountable for the personal, social, and environmental factors that contribute to academic success.
- It is blind to the fact that most students do not drop out of school due to a lack of academic ability<sup>‡</sup>.

The Aspirations framework is the deeper and broader approach imagined by the president’s plan. It sublates academic achievement into the far greater effort to develop in students the ability to dream about the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams. That effort is the one most schools proclaim they are making in their mission statements. If schools should be held accountable to anything, they should be accountable to living out their espoused mission statement on a daily basis.

The My Voice<sup>™</sup> Student Survey adds a vital set of data to a school’s decision making capacity (see [www.myvoicesurveys.com](http://www.myvoicesurveys.com)). When schools learn whether or not they are helping students believe in themselves, become actively engaged learners, and develop a sense of purpose, they are uncovering the very factors that lead to academic success. Successful schools recognize that the best curricula, teachers, and teaching strategies

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<sup>‡</sup> *Issues Impacting Struggling Students and Out-of-School Youth*. Prepared by Terry Grobe, Commonwealth Corporation with assistance from Kathy Hamilton, Boston Private Industry Council (2005).

only work to the degree students are connected to them. Aspirations is a more expansive approach to schooling that, when adopted and implemented, helps schools become accountable not only to their state's Department of Education, but to their students, staff, and parents.

To meet the challenge of improving assessment, retention, and a school's capacity to reach all students, QISA, in partnership with Pearson Assessment, will provide each state with My Voice Surveys for students in grades three through twelve. Surveys are available in English and Spanish. A variety of services are also available through Pearson for helping schools understand and make use of their survey results.

Additionally, QISA will provide three statewide conferences during the academic year—autumn, winter, and late spring. The autumn conference will consist of a keynote address by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, followed by six tracks:

- One that addresses the effort of elementary schools to integrate the 8 Conditions with their social and student behavior management programs, and with academic curricula.
- Two that explore the use of QISA's *Student Aspirations Portfolio* to address the relationship between the 8 Conditions and academic achievement. One for schools that have an advisory program and one for school counselors.
- Two that explore the use of QISA's *Aspirations Advocate* program as a way of improving student retention or assisting English language learners.
- One that explores the use of the 8 Conditions framework as a way of supporting students with disabilities. Participants in this session will receive a teaching guidebook that addresses the particular concerns of those who work with these special students.

The winter conference will focus on the My Voice Survey. The conference will begin with attention to the tracks explored in the first session. Later breakout sessions will be organized by condition to help schools focus on a particular area for improvement and data-driven action planning. The spring conference will provide an opportunity to share results, discuss best practices, and consider the deeper systemic implications of these early efforts.

Participants will receive an *Aspirations Resource Binder* that includes reproducible guidebooks for teachers, parents, coaches, school board members, and administrators. The binder also includes grade appropriate student guidebooks and activities and a *Student Aspirations Portfolio*. A separate resource containing the *Aspirations Advocate* program will be available to participants who choose that track. All participants will receive online access to Aspirations resources, research, and networks.

### III. RECRUIT, EDUCATE, AND REWARD TEACHERS

Both the quantity and the quality of a school's teachers are among the most influential factors in a school's success with students. More teachers mean better student-teacher ratios. Better trained and educated teachers means increased capacity to provide the support and challenge necessary to have each and every student excel, whatever his or her ability. Toward that end, the administration has set out five goals:

1. **Make Math and Science Education a National Priority:** Recruit math and science degree graduates to the teaching profession and support efforts to help these teachers learn from professionals in the field. Ensure that all children have access to a strong science and math curriculum at all grade levels.
2. **Recruit Teachers:** Create new Teacher Service Scholarships that will cover four years of undergraduate or two years of graduate teacher education, including high quality alternative programs for mid-career recruits in exchange for teaching at least four years in a high-need field or location.
3. **Prepare Teachers:** Require all schools of education to be accredited. Create a voluntary national performance assessment to be sure every new educator is trained and ready to start teaching effectively. Create Teacher Residency Programs that will supply 30,000 exceptionally well prepared recruits to high-need schools.
4. **Retain Teachers:** Expand mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits. Provide incentives to give teachers paid common planning time so they can collaborate to share best practices.
5. **Reward Teachers:** Promote new and innovative ways to increase teachers' pay that are developed with teachers, not imposed on them. Districts will be able to design programs that reward, by way of salary increase, accomplished educators who serve as mentors to new teachers. Districts can reward teachers who work in underserved places like rural areas and inner cities. If teachers consistently excel in the classroom, that work can be rewarded as well.

While some of these proposals are not without controversy, the effort to recruit, educate, and retain the best available teaching professionals is a laudable one. Given that the primary point of contact for learning is the teacher-student relationship, this part of the administration's plan cannot be over emphasized.



## THE QUAGLIA INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ASPIRATIONS RESPONSE

The main focus of QISA's work to improve student aspirations has been the professional development of teachers. Teachers, more so than administrators, are a consistent presence in a school's life. The student population is transient by nature and administrators at all levels seem to turnover at an increasingly faster rate. Teachers, however, seem to settle into a school and thrive on being there for their entire career. This has both benefits and challenges, and the president's plan seeks to enhance the former while rising to the latter.

The induction of new teachers, the ongoing development of those who have some experience, and the invitation to the most practiced to mentor colleagues, are critical elements in a school's success. When teachers are asked why they entered or why they remain in the profession, most respond with some version of one of the 8 Conditions.

"I wanted to help create and be part of a community of learning." – Belonging

"I stay because I see that my work makes a difference." – Heroes

"I enjoy sharing my passion for science." – Fun & Excitement

"I want to inspire students to achieve their full potential." – Confidence to Take Action

Like a school's mission statement, the core beliefs of many teachers are more aligned with the effort to inspire students to achieve their dreams than they are with the effort to make AYP. However, these are not mutually exclusive. It is more a question of priority. Educate teachers so that they can develop students' self-worth, active engagement, and sense of purpose, and students' subsequent connection with their teachers and school will result in ever improving academic achievement. Focus first on academic achievement, often at the expense of nurturing relationships, fostering imagination, and exploring relevance, and you will lose students to the hallways and the streets. Students perform at their best for teachers they like and respect the most.

Our current education programs do an excellent job of helping classroom teachers master and deliver what Elliot Eisner called the explicit curriculum. QISA's expertise is in helping teachers attend to and become adept in the implicit curriculum. Bringing the 8 Conditions alive in the classroom is a matter of helping teachers do more intentionally what they already do intuitively on their best days.

To support efforts to induct new and educate all teachers, QISA will offer three statewide conferences during the academic year – late summer, winter, and early spring. The late summer conference, held at the end of August or early in September, will consist of:

- A keynote address by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, the founder and president of the Quaglia Institute and the leading educator in the field of student aspirations.
- Separate breakout sessions for elementary, middle, and high school teachers, as well as one for after-school providers (see part five of the administration's plans below).
- Special break out sessions to explore the relationship between math and science curriculum and the 8 Conditions.
- An action planning session to develop concrete goals and strategies for the remainder of the year.

Participation in this conference will include a grade appropriate *Aspirations Resource Binder* with reproducible teaching self-reflective guidebooks, student guidebooks, and 8 Conditions activity books. Elementary school participants will receive *Sam's Adventures in School*, a children's book written by Dr. Quaglia, to help students discuss the first days of school.

In preparation for the midyear conference, QISA, in partnership with Pearson Assessment, will provide each state with My Voice Surveys for all school staff members. A variety of services are also available through Pearson for helping schools understand and make use of their staff survey results. The midyear conference will focus on using the results of the My Voice Staff Survey and QISA's professional mentoring resources to improve collegiality and communication in schools. After-school providers are welcome at this session as well. Sessions will focus on the 8 Conditions as they exist not only for students, but for all school staff. At this session teachers will receive an *Aspirations Teacher Portfolio* to help them develop the 8 Conditions for themselves. The final conference invites participants to share results, discuss best practices, and consider the implications of these early efforts on their professional relationships and their work with students.

QISA's staff includes several professors of education and will extend, through each state's Department of Education, an offer to lecture on the campus of the state's public university or state college, either as a recruiting aid or in support of the education of undergraduates and graduates in the state's school of education.

## IV. CHARTER SCHOOLS

Of all the proposals put forth by the new administration, the commitment to increase the number of charter schools perhaps rankles the rank and file in the public education system the most. While few can deny the results that many charter schools achieve – several of those with the most difficult students – some argue that charter schools are bound by a different set of rules and so comparisons are unfair.

A Department of Education study<sup>§</sup> of seven charter schools that are having success noted several common themes. Among them were:

- **Mission-driven:** These schools create a shared vision with school leaders, teachers, parents, and students, all relentlessly focused on ensuring success.
- **Teaching for Mastery:** Teachers are expected to teach for understanding. The use of interim assessments helps teachers monitor student progress.
- **Positive School Culture:** Each school creates a safe learning environment and a strong school culture built around the education vision.
- **Families as Partners:** Schools engage parents in a variety of ways, such as requiring them to sign off on homework and participate in school decisions.
- **Innovating Across the Program:** They have flexibility to create a longer school day or year, design unique staffing arrangements, and make budget decisions that advance the goals of their school.
- **Continuous Professional Learning and Improvement:** These schools are committed to ongoing internal professional development, often arranging time for teachers to work collaboratively. Coaching and training are provided, and all staff members are engaged in continuous professional learning.

In addition to these successes, the challenges facing charter schools include finding funding, adequate facilities, and the business expertise necessary to stay solvent. The current administration's plans include monetary support for high quality schools and closing low performing schools. The administration intends to accomplish this by expanding charter school funding only to states that improve accountability for charter schools, allowing for interventions in struggling charter schools, and having a clear process for closing down chronically underperforming charter schools. The administration has pledged to support states that help successful charter schools expand to serve more students.

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<sup>§</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2007). *K–8 Charter Schools: Closing the Achievement Gap: Innovations in Education*



## THE QUAGLIA INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ASPIRATIONS RESPONSE

When one studies the success of charter schools, one sees a significant parallel with Student Aspirations and the 8 Conditions. Charter schools thrive by creating an environment in which all participants feel valued, where all members of the learning community are actively engaged, and where learning is focused on purposeful action and future success. In many ways, when successful, charter schools are models of the very definition of Aspirations – providing students with the ability to dream and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.

They accomplish this by being free of more traditional norms and ways of doing things. Unfettered by convention and working toward a common vision, each charter school community is free to create the policies, schedules, curricula, and professional development that will lead to the most positive results. In addition, charter schools seem more adept at using formative assessments, as well as summative evaluations of students. Perhaps their governing structures make them more agile and able to respond to uncovered needs.

Charter schools are welcome to attend any and all of the conferences and sessions QISA is offering in response to other parts of the administration's plans. All My Voice products and services offered through Pearson Assessment are also available to charter schools. Additionally, QISA will partner with The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools to offer workshops in the Aspirations framework during their national conferences [pending]. Like President Obama and Secretary Duncan, QISA recognizes that charter schools have much to offer the larger school community. QISA looks forward to drawing out of those schools their best practices in the 8 Conditions at the statewide conferences.

QISA also invites any interested and entrepreneurial individuals who want to consider using the Aspirations framework and the 8 Conditions as a governing structure for a new charter school, or the reform of one that is struggling, to contact us. We would welcome the opportunity to partner with you in developing an Aspirations elementary, middle, or high school.

## V. EXPAND LIFELONG LEARNING

Here we find the culmination of the president's educational agenda. Each step in the plan from early childhood education through improving assessment, accountability and teacher education, right up to supporting charter schools as models of educational success, has moved toward the goal of developing the habits of lifelong learning in our nation's young citizens. Achieving this result involves five commitments:

1. **Expand High Quality After-school Opportunities:** Double funding for the main federal support for after-school programs and the 21st Century Learning Centers program to serve one million more children.
2. **Support College outreach programs:** Programs like GEAR UP, TRIO and Upward Bound should be promoted to encourage more young people from low income families to consider and prepare for college.
3. **Support College Credit Initiatives:** Create a national "Make College A Reality" initiative that has a bold goal of increasing students taking AP or college level classes nationwide 50% by 2016.
4. **Create the American Opportunity Tax Credit:** This universal and fully refundable credit will ensure that the first \$4,000 of a college education is completely free for most Americans, will cover two-thirds the cost of tuition at the average public college or university and make community college tuition completely free for most students. Recipients of the credit will be required to conduct 100 hours of community service.
5. **Simplify the Application Process for Financial Aid:** The financial aid processes will be streamlined by eliminating the current federal financial aid application and enabling families to apply simply by checking a box on their tax form, authorizing their tax information to be used, and eliminating the need for a separate application.

It is clear that President Obama's administration sees post-secondary education in some form or other as a key to success not only in life, but in the economy as well. As newer and newer fields, professions, and jobs emerge, we need a workforce capable of learning at any point in their lives. Now and in the future, we will need people who not only know facts and information, but people who are curious and creative. We need a citizenry capable of filling jobs that do not exist, and that we can barely imagine.



## THE QUAGLIA INSTITUTE FOR STUDENT ASPIRATIONS RESPONSE

QISA’s research shows that students who believe that going to college is important for their future respond more positively on all other indicators on the My Voice Survey measuring the 8 Conditions. The table below shows the most dramatic results in this regard.

My Voice Survey Statement	Student Responses	
<b>I think going to college is important to my future.</b>	Students who agreed with this statement also reported that:	Students who did NOT agree with this statement reported that:
School is a welcoming and friendly place.	66%	45%
Teachers care about my problems and feelings.	47%	29%
Teachers care about me as an individual.	51%	31%
Teachers respect students.	58%	34%
Teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.	73%	53%
Teachers recognize me when I try my best.	61%	37%
I put forth my best effort at school.	75%	39%
I enjoy being at school.	53%	28%
Learning can be fun.	68%	39%
At school I am encouraged to be creative.	60%	37%
What I learn in school will benefit my future.	82%	40%
Teachers think I can be successful.	75%	44%
I am excited about my future.	83%	45%

QISA’s approach is grounded in the belief that students who have a more positive experience of the 8 Conditions have higher aspirations for themselves – aspirations which frequently include education beyond high school. Schools that foster the 8 Conditions and change or create policies, norms, and customs in the effort to implement and sustain the 8 Conditions, have a much greater chance of creating

lifelong learners than schools that do not attend to students' self-worth, active engagement, or sense of purpose.

In addition to the responses already outlined, QISA, in partnership with Pearson Assessment, will make special My Voice reports available to states and districts wishing to explore the relationship between their students planning to go to college and those who are not, and the 8 Conditions. That data can then be used to target interventions and professional development designed to improve the likelihood of students raising their sights to include further education. When necessary, the *Student Aspirations Portfolio* can be useful in the effort to promote post-secondary education. A *College Readiness Guidebook* will also be available to high schools that have adopted the Aspirations workshop. It is recommended that this guidebook be used with high school sophomores and juniors.

After-school providers are welcome at the conference for school personnel outlined in response III above. There they will learn about the 8 Conditions and have an opportunity to meet with other after-school colleagues at a special breakout session.