

*My Voice*TM
Staff Report
2008



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The Role of Aspirations in Today's Schools

When people in schools have high aspirations, *they have the ability to dream about the future, while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.* Whether their goal is to be a better classroom teacher, become a department head or supervisor, or simply to do their job to the best of their ability, people working in schools want to be successful. Too often, however, school staff can't reach their goals and dreams because the conditions around them are not supportive. As a result, their aspirations flounder and effectiveness wanes, thus affecting the entire teaching and learning environment.

In order for school staff to have and sustain high aspirations, the conditions that enable them to reach their goals must be in place. These conditions are known as the **8 Conditions that Make a Difference®** and are a critical, often overlooked, part of education and school improvement initiatives. The 8 Conditions have been identified and defined by Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, an internationally known leader in the study of student aspirations. The 8 Conditions are: *Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action.* All members of the school community can foster the 8 Conditions, making a positive difference in the lives of their colleagues and today's students by supporting the goals each person sets and strives to reach. In order to measure these conditions in today's schools, the *My Voice™* Staff Aspirations Survey was developed.

THE MY VOICE STAFF ASPIRATIONS SURVEY

The *My Voice* Staff Aspirations Survey assesses staff aspirations by asking questions based on the 8 Conditions. By asking how *staff* perceive the school environment, *My Voice* provides educators and those that support them with a powerful tool for understanding both what motivates and inspires every person to achieve, and how well the staff believes their school is meeting those objectives.

Demographics for the My Voice Staff Aspirations Survey

A total of 20,913 staff members completed the *My Voice* Staff Aspirations Survey. Sixty-three percent (63%) were classroom teachers; 20% were certified support staff and 17% were support staff. Twenty-four percent (24%) were male and 76% were female. The grade levels with which they worked and the length of time they had worked in schools varied as follows:

Grade level		Grade level	
Prek-2	17%	Grades 6-8	22%
Grades 3-5	20%	Grades 9-12	41%

Years working in schools		Years working in <i>current</i> school	
5 years or less	25%	47%	
6-20 years	49%	42%	
Over 20 years	26%	11%	

Staff surveyed also reported different levels of education: 43% said they had a master's or master's plus; 38% said they had a bachelor's degree; 6% had an associate degree; and 13% had a high school diploma or G.E.D.

My Voice Staff Aspirations Report

The *My Voice* Staff Aspirations Report is organized around the 8 Conditions. In each section, the condition is defined and data on the survey statements about that condition are described. The data are reported in percentages based on the combined number of staff who responded "strongly agree" or "agree" to each statement. The results are then discussed in relation to key aspects of the condition. A section on Administration and Communication is included, as are comparisons between staff and student responses to similar questions. There is also a section about respect in schools. A brief conclusion and discussion of key areas in need of attention are included at the end of the report.

CONDITION 1. BELONGING

The first condition that needs to be in place is Belonging. Belonging entails establishing a sense of community and participation, and believing that all participants in the educational process are valuable members. Administrators expect all employees to be fully active participants in the life of the school, and responsible, contributing citizens of the school. The pertinent question is: Are standards and expectations for responsibility and success set in a context of peer and administrative support? Schools may be bureaucratic, but their democratic roots should extend to and nourish the entire staff as full partners in the entire educational process.

Staff Perceptions of Belonging

There are two key aspects to the condition of Belonging in schools. First, staff must perceive school as a community in which they feel connected, safe, and supported. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the staff surveyed agreed with the statement "School is a welcoming and friendly place." Seventy-three percent (73%) of staff surveyed said they feel comfortable in the staff room. Eighty-five percent (85%) of staff reported that they are proud of their school, and 39% agreed that bullying is a problem in their school.

The second key aspect of the condition of Belonging is that staff feel valued for who they are as individuals. Eighty-three percent (83%) of the staff surveyed agreed with the statement "I feel accepted for who I am at school," and 76% said they feel valued for their unique skills and talents. Seventy percent (70%) believe students care about their feelings.

Belonging Statements	% in agreement
I feel valued for my unique skills and talents.	76%
School is a welcoming and friendly place.	82%
I am proud of my school.	85%
I think bullying is a problem at my school.	39%
I feel comfortable in the staff room.	73%
Students care about my feelings.	70%
I feel accepted for who I am at school.	83%

Discussion

The findings reveal that there is a strong sense of Belonging among the staff surveyed. The majority of staff feel connected to their school community and valued for who they are as individuals. These findings are very positive and schools should celebrate their successful ability to foster the condition of Belonging. At the same time, it is important to realize that one in four staff do *not* feel valued for their unique skills and talents, suggesting that schools must continue to find ways to recognize individual abilities and celebrate them in visible ways.

Students impact staff members' sense of Belonging, yet three out of ten staff do not think students care about their feelings. If schools are going to foster a sense of Belonging, they must find ways to deepen the connection between all staff and the students they serve. This challenge may need to begin with the students themselves. Close to two out of five staff state bullying is a problem, suggesting that students may not have as strong a sense of Belonging as staff. Schools have done a good job of fostering the condition of Belonging among adults. How do they strengthen this condition for students?

The condition of Belonging is the foundation on which the other conditions are built. If the adults in the school do not feel a sense of Belonging, they will not develop the self-worth needed to actualize their potential. While the *My Voice* findings are relatively strong for this condition, schools must continue to cultivate a sense of Belonging in order for aspirations to be high throughout the building.

CONDITION 2. HEROES

The second condition is Heroes. We have found that school employees who are highly motivated form meaningful relationships with others in the school. Heroes are our trusted guides. Mutual respect and commitment to one another are the hallmarks of a staff dedicated to building-wide school improvement. Too often in today's schools, adults become isolated from one another. The condition of Heroes reminds us that what happens in schools ought never be a solitary enterprise.

Staff Perceptions of Heroes

The condition of Heroes emphasizes the critical ways adults in the building believe in, support and inspire each other. In response to *My Voice* questions about this condition, 88% of staff surveyed said they have a colleague who is a positive role model and 93% agreed with the statement "If I have a problem, I have a colleague with whom I can talk." The condition of Heroes is also about respect. Ninety-one percent (91%) of staff surveyed said students respect them and 99% said they respect students. Fewer agreed (72%) with the statement "Staff respect each other."

Students can also be Heroes to staff members. High percentages of staff agreed with the following statements: "Students care about me as an individual" (76%) and "Students care if I am absent from school" (78%).

Heroes Statements	% in agreement
Students care if I am absent from school.	78%
I have a colleague at school who is a positive role model for me.	88%
If I have a problem, I have a colleague with whom I can talk.	93%
Staff respect each other.	72%
Students respect me.	91%
I respect students.	99%
Students care about me as an individual.	76%

Discussion

Across the board, high numbers of staff agreed with the statements under the condition of Heroes. Of particular note, approximately nine out of ten staff said they have a colleague who is a positive role model and someone they can talk to. The condition of Heroes depends on individuals having positive relationships, and clearly school staff have developed such bonds in their professional lives. Students can also be Heroes to staff--students can inspire staff with their enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, and willingness to try new things. While a relatively high percentage of staff said they think students care about them, schools could benefit from continued efforts to foster the condition of Heroes. When the condition is in place, staff are more confident in themselves and more trusting of others.

Respect plays a key role in the condition of Heroes and almost all staff believe there is mutual respect between staff and students. However, just seven out of ten said staff respect each other. This number should be of concern to educators because it reveals that 30% do not feel there is respect among colleagues. How do staff members define respect among colleagues? How can schools do a better job of creating a culture of respect among staff? These questions must be discussed in an open and honest way for the condition of Heroes to be cultivated. Respect among colleagues creates an environment where staff not only believe in and support one another, but work together in the best interests of students.

CONDITION 3. SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

Sense of Accomplishment is about recognizing and appreciating effort, perseverance, and citizenship. Meeting performance goals in one's job is only one indicator of success. Highly dedicated employees make contributions beyond the "call of duty." In schools that exhibit a Sense of Accomplishment reward systems encourage effort, as well as end product. When staff are recognized for their effort, they will be more motivated to persevere through difficult tasks and to create a healthy work environment through hard work and dedication.

Staff Perceptions of Sense of Accomplishment

When asked questions about the condition of Sense of Accomplishment, 81% of staff surveyed agreed with the statement: "Professional development is an important part of

my educational growth.” Seventy-five percent (75%) said they receive constructive feedback from colleagues. When asked about whether accomplishments are recognized or citizenship is celebrated in their school, 57% of staff said their school celebrates the accomplishments of the staff. Sixteen percent (16%) stated they have never been recognized for something positive at school.

When asked questions about their effort and perseverance, 47% of staff surveyed agreed with the statement “I feel overwhelmed by my workload,” while 98% stated that they put forth their best effort at school. Fifty-three percent (53%) of staff surveyed said they are recognized when they try their best.

Sense of Accomplishment Statements	% in agreement
I have never been recognized for something positive at school.	16%
I feel overwhelmed by my workload.	47%
I receive constructive feedback from colleagues.	75%
I put forth my best effort at school.	98%
Our school celebrates the accomplishments of the staff.	57%
I am recognized when I try my best.	53%
Professional development is an important part of my educational growth.	81%

Discussion

The condition of Sense of Accomplishment emphasizes the importance of taking time to recognize and celebrate accomplishments, whether big or small. Yet just over half of the staff said their school celebrates accomplishments and almost one in five said they have never been recognized for something positive at school. The fact that so few staff believe they receive this kind of support is surprising and worrisome. School staff need to be appreciated for their contributions, citizenship, and initiative. Without a Sense of Accomplishment, their willingness to be part of the school community and to go above and beyond in their daily work will lessen, ultimately impacting students in negative ways.

Results are similar in terms of effort. Close to 100% of staff said they try their best, yet just half of all staff said they were recognized for putting forth their best effort. In addition, almost half of the staff surveyed said they feel overwhelmed by their workload. There are two issues at play here: 1. the need for staff to have their effort acknowledged and 2. the difficulties staff face in persevering when they are often overwhelmed by their work. For the condition of Sense of Accomplishment to thrive, schools must find more effective ways to recognize staff effort and support perseverance. More importantly, staff need to be appreciated in ways that are meaningful to them. School leaders may think they recognize staff for their accomplishments, but they may not do so in ways that staff find meaningful. Schools must have open discussions about how to cultivate a Sense of Accomplishment throughout the building. In addition, the challenges of workload must be examined more closely.

Finally, while the majority of staff said they receive constructive feedback from their colleagues, this still leaves a full quarter of staff who do not feel supported by their peers. Similarly, despite the fact that most staff say professional development is important to their growth as educators, one out of five staff don't agree. If schools are to truly embrace the condition of Sense of Accomplishment, there must be even greater support among staff members—so that all members of the staff feel recognized for their effort, perseverance, and contributions. In addition, the significance of professional development must be more widely discussed so that all members of the school community see the value in continuing to grow and learn as educators.

CONDITION 4. FUN & EXCITEMENT

Fun & Excitement is about being interested and engaged by one's work; enjoyment improves one's effectiveness. When staff are excited, they are eagerly engaged, actively involved, and they contribute more. If we expect all employees to be enthusiastic about coming to school, we must provide diverse, interesting, challenging and enjoyable work experiences.

Staff Perceptions of Fun & Excitement

Fun & Excitement is first and foremost about staff being engaged in their work. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of staff surveyed said they enjoy working at their school and 96% said they are excited to be working with students. A high percentage (85%) of staff agreed with the statement "I have fun at school," and almost all (99%) agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun."

Students play an important role in whether the condition of Fun & Excitement is present in a school or classroom. Eighty-five percent (85%) of staff surveyed agreed that "Students make school an exciting place to work." Seventy-nine percent (79%) of the staff surveyed think students enjoy working with teachers and 77% of staff agreed with the statement "Students have fun at school."

Fun & Excitement Statements	% in agreement
I enjoy working here.	88%
I am excited to be working with students.	96%
Students enjoy working with teachers.	79%
Students have fun at school.	77%
Students make school an exciting place to work.	85%
I have fun at school.	85%
Learning can be fun.	99%

Discussion

The findings for the condition of Fun & Excitement were generally very positive. Almost all staff said they are excited to work with students and agreed learning can be fun. Slightly fewer said they have fun at school and enjoy working at their school, suggesting that the school environment actually dampens staff enthusiasm. Schools must

examine this disconnect and find ways to actualize staff enthusiasm about their work. Without the condition of Fun & Excitement, staff are less likely to be engaged in their daily work; they are less likely to be prepared—and willing—to meet the challenges of the day.

The weakest findings in this condition were about staff perceptions of students. While close to nine out of ten staff agreed that students make school an exciting place to work, fewer said they think students enjoy working with teachers and students have fun at school. It is not enough for staff to be excited about teaching and learning. Students, too, must be engaged. How can schools address this issue? Keeping in mind that these are staff *perceptions* of students, the findings suggest that some school-wide discussions about what students find most engaging about their learning, as well as the role staff play in that process, may reveal important information about Fun & Excitement in the school.

CONDITION 5. CURIOSITY & CREATIVITY

At the center of the 8 Conditions we find Curiosity & Creativity. Allowing and encouraging all the participants in the school building to question and explore fosters this condition. Staff should be encouraged to trust and nurture their own curiosity and creativity. One of the greatest obstacles to learning in schools is the routine that can set in day after day, term after term, year after year. All staff members in an educational institution should be open to the same growth and change we expect of students.

Staff Perceptions of Curiosity & Creativity

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity encourages staff to experience the joy of exploring new ideas. When asked about learning, 99% of staff surveyed stated they enjoy learning new things and ninety-four percent (94%) said they seek out opportunities to learn new things. However, just 55% agreed with the statement “Meaningful professional development opportunities exist in my district,” and only 62% of staff said the building administration is open to new ideas. Similarly, only 67% of staff surveyed agreed with the statement “Our school is a dynamic and creative learning environment,” and 71% agreed with the statement “At school I am encouraged to be creative.” Sixty-six percent (66%) of staff agreed with the statement “I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.”

Curiosity & Creativity Statements	% in agreement
At school I am encouraged to be creative.	71%
Building administration is open to new ideas.	62%
I enjoy learning new things.	99%
Our school is a dynamic and creative learning environment.	67%
I seek out opportunities to learn new things.	94%
Meaningful professional development opportunities exist in my district.	55%
I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.	66%

Discussion

Questions about the condition of Curiosity & Creativity revealed that virtually all staff surveyed like to learn new things and seek out opportunities to do so. Despite these high numbers, just three out of five said the school administration is open to new ideas, suggesting that while staff want to explore new ideas, administration is perceived as limiting their ability to do so. In addition, just over half of staff said their district offers them meaningful professional development opportunities and two-thirds said they are encouraged to be creative at school, further underscoring the challenges staff face in pursuing their interests. Curiosity & Creativity can diminish over time, as staff become familiar with the status quo. To keep this condition alive, the school system and staff must explore ways to nurture the desire to learn.

Curiosity & Creativity also means that staff must be engaged enough in their work to ask “Why?” and “Why not?” questions. Yet, just two-thirds said they feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings. Schools must establish open and creative discussion to keep all staff actively engaged in their work and staff need to challenge themselves to be more actively engaged in the school community.

CONDITION 6. SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Spirit of Adventure is about being supported so that one can take healthy risks, trusting that it is all right to make mistakes and knowing there is something to be learned from all consequences—positive and negative. Any type of new idea, strategy, or tactic can pose a risk; for some, it might be making a career change, and for others, simply trying out a new way of doing something. Creativity and innovation spring from the sense of security and support that allows and encourages employees to take healthy chances.

Staff Perceptions of *Spirit of Adventure*

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is about staff trying new things. It is about staff moving from their comfort zone to their challenge zone. Staff face two common obstacles when they do so: the fear of success and the fear of failure. Ninety-four percent (94%) of staff surveyed said they challenge themselves to do a better job every day. Eleven percent (11%) of staff reported they are afraid to try something if they think they may fail. In terms of anxiety around success, 26% of staff agreed with the statement “I am concerned my colleagues will resent me if I am too successful.” More troubling, just 59% reported they are excited to tell their colleagues when they do something well.

Another key aspect of Spirit of Adventure is whether staff feel supported when they want to try new things. Support can come from many sources, including peers and supervisors. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of staff surveyed believe colleagues help them learn from their mistakes, and 59% said setting yearly goals with their supervisor is important for their work. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the staff surveyed stated that staff are supportive of each other.

Spirit of Adventure Statements	% in agreement
Setting yearly goals with my supervisor is important for my work.	59%
I challenge myself to do a better job every day.	94%
Staff are supportive of each other.	75%
I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.	11%
My colleagues help me learn from my mistakes.	69%
I am concerned my colleagues will resent me if I am too successful.	26%
I am excited to tell my colleagues when I do something well.	59%

Discussion

Findings for Spirit of Adventure were mixed. On the one hand, almost all staff say they challenge themselves to do a better job every day. On the other hand, staff express concern about what it means to fail, as well as what it means to succeed: one in ten are afraid to try something if they might fail and only three out of five are excited to share their successes with colleagues. Moreover, a quarter of the staff are actually concerned their colleagues will resent them if they are too successful. For the Spirit of Adventure to thrive, it must be safe for staff both to fail and to succeed. What measures are in place if staff fail? Schools must decrease staff resentment, and increase staff excitement, around individual successes.

Staff also reported mixed feelings about the level of support they receive in school. Support from colleagues received the highest percentage of agreement reinforcing the fact that support among peers is strong. However, these findings also mean that one out of four staff members *do not* feel supported. The fact that only three out of five staff said setting yearly goals with their supervisor was important to their work reveals an area in need of development. Schools reach their fullest potential if there is a culture of visible, active goal-setting not only among peers but between staff and administration. For staff to take the steps necessary to reach their goals and dreams, those aspirations must be articulated and, when possible, facilitated by the school community, in particular supervisors. To do this, supervisors need to create time to meet regularly with their staff. Without the Spirit of Adventure, schools remain tied to the way they have always done things, rather than taking healthy risks that create a more positive teaching and learning environment.

CONDITION 7. LEADERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility deals with giving every member of the staff a voice in the school—letting them know they matter and are trusted to make decisions. If all personnel are expected to be responsible members of the school community, they must be trusted enough to have a voice in their departments and in the building as a whole. A school which encourages Leadership & Responsibility, embraces and promotes mutual trust and acceptance of individual rights, responsibilities, opinions, and beliefs. All of its members are allowed to practice leadership skills, to understand and accept

consequences, and to learn from their mistakes and move forward with greater knowledge and understanding.

Staff Perceptions of Leadership & Responsibility

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility is twofold: staff must develop strong decision-making skills and have real leadership opportunities. Only then can they be truly responsible leaders who make a difference in their school. When asked about decision making, 95% of staff surveyed reported they think about others' feelings when they make decisions. Ninety-five percent (95%) of staff also stated that they encourage students to make decisions. Eighty percent (80%) said they actively seek out student opinions and ideas.

When asked about leadership in their communities, just 73% of staff reported that they know the goals their school is working on this year. Even fewer (40%) said they are involved in school-wide decisions. When asked questions about themselves as leaders, 77% of staff surveyed agreed with the statement "I see myself as a leader," while just 52% said their colleagues see them as a leader.

Leadership & Responsibility Statements	% in agreement
I see myself as a leader.	77%
My colleagues see me as a leader.	52%
I am involved in school-wide decisions.	40%
I know the goals my school is working on this year.	73%
I actively seek out student opinions and ideas.	80%
I encourage students to make decisions.	95%
I think about others' feelings when I make decisions.	95%

Discussion

The findings in this condition reveal that although three out of four staff see themselves as leaders, this self-perception does not necessarily translate into leadership opportunities and actions. For example, just half of staff surveyed believe their colleagues see them as a leader. For the condition of Leadership & Responsibility to thrive, staff cannot just think of themselves as leaders--they must learn to be leaders in their school. Yet only two out of five staff say they are involved in school-wide decisions. These findings beg the question: Why aren't the staff involved in making decisions in today's schools? Staff clearly believe they have the ability to participate in decision making at the school. Schools must tap into this valuable resource and staff must take the initiative to become involved in decisions that affect them in their work environment.

Staff must also foster Leadership & Responsibility among their students. Nine out of ten staff said they encourage students to make decisions and eight out of ten said they seek student ideas and opinions, suggesting that staff are working to cultivate this condition among students. However, the effectiveness of doing so comes into question given the fact that one quarter of school staff do not know the goals their school is working on. For all members of the school to work together toward a common set of goals, better

communication must be in place. In addition, staff must do more than think of themselves as leaders; they must take responsibility for understanding their school's goals.

CONDITION 8. CONFIDENCE TO TAKE ACTION

The eighth and final condition is Confidence to Take Action. This is the condition staff should all strive for. Schools that foster this condition encourage all members to believe in themselves, trusting that they can be successful and are making a difference. Though society's expectations of schools are high, the confidence needed to meet those expectations must be internal to each employee. Awards, accolades, and other external recognition for success are welcome, but the intrinsic desire to provide the best service one is capable of must drive effective employment. Schools that value, respect and celebrate the opinions and ideas of all staff members foster positive development of everyone's sense of purpose.

Staff Perceptions of Confidence to Take Action

The condition of Confidence to Take Action is the pinnacle of the 8 Conditions framework and also the goal of all educational ventures: to provide staff with enough belief in themselves that they can set goals for the future and take steps in the present to reach those goals. When asked questions about goal-setting, 96% of staff surveyed reported they think it is important to set high goals. Ninety-seven percent (97%) said they work hard to reach their goals. Fewer (60%) agreed with the statement "I feel confident voicing my honest opinions and concerns."

The ability to set and reach for goals is directly connected to a positive view of one's future. Ninety-seven percent (97%) of staff surveyed agreed with the statement "I believe I can be successful." Ninety-two percent (92%) agreed with the statement "I believe I can make a difference in this world." Seventy-one percent (71%) said that they are excited about their future career in education. Seventy-eight percent (78%) said that continuing their education is important to their future and 78% said they are confident working with students with special needs.

Confidence to Take Action Statements	% in agreement
I believe I can be successful.	97%
I believe I can make a difference in this world.	92%
I feel confident voicing my honest opinions and concerns.	60%
I work hard to reach my goals.	97%
I am excited about my future career in education.	71%
Continuing my education is important for my future.	78%
I think it is important to set high goals.	96%
I feel confident working with students with special needs.	78%

Discussion

There is a difference between dreaming about the future and taking the steps needed to reach those dreams. The condition of Confidence to Take Action is defined by the successful integration of these two processes and the majority of staff surveyed appear to know it is important both to set high goals *and* work hard to reach them. Nine out of ten staff believe they can be successful and that they can make a difference in the world. These positive findings should be celebrated by school administration and staff. There appears to be a real sense of purpose among school staff.

At the same time that staff are goal-oriented and optimistic about the future, just three out of five feel confident saying what they honestly think. Schools need honest input and feedback if they are to make good decisions and healthy changes; they must do a better job of making it safe for staff to voice their opinions. Of additional concern is that just seven out of ten staff are excited about their future in the field of education. Schools must tap into the positive findings around goal-setting and making a difference so that staff bring their optimism to schools today and in the future. Perhaps more importantly, school staff need to take responsibility for their career choices—and the students they work with—and stay passionate about their work.

ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATION

The presence or absence of the 8 Conditions in a school can depend in large part on how authority and power are exercised and distributed in the school and district. Effective leadership ensures the 8 Conditions are in the lives of the staff. Additionally, effective leadership at all levels requires effective communication.

Staff Perceptions of Administration and Communication

Within the school building, 82% of staff say they have access to the administration and 77% say the administration is visible in the school. However, just 47% agree with the statement “We communicate effectively in our building.” Fifty-one percent (51%) say the building administration knows their professional goals.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of staff said that they communicate effectively with parents, while 41% said that the central office understands the unique culture of their school. Sixty-seven percent (67%) agreed with the statement “I know my students’ hopes and dreams.”

Administration and Communication Statements	% in agreement
Central office understands the unique culture of our school.	41%
We communicate effectively in our building.	47%
I know my students’ hopes and dreams.	67%
Building administration is visible in our school.	77%
Building administration knows my professional goals.	51%
Building administration is accessible to me.	82%
I communicate effectively with parents.	83%

Discussion

While relatively high numbers of staff said the administration is accessible and visible, far fewer said this translates into effective communication and professional understanding. It is not enough for administration to be present—they must create, and provide for, meaningful interactions with school staff, fostering an environment of open, honest, supportive communication. Being visible in the building is the foundation for strong communication, but administrators must be willing to take the risk required of good leaders and develop effective methods of communicating with, and supporting, their staff.

Central office administration faces even greater challenges in fostering staff aspirations, in part because they do not have daily interaction with staff and in part because they are removed from the daily experience of working with students. The fact that only two out of five staff feels their school is understood by the central office reflects the need for increased communication and interaction. Central office must find ways to be in schools, interacting with staff and students, on a regular basis. Doing so will change the nature of the educational system from how decisions are made to the types of policies that are created.

Finally, while four out of five staff believe they communicate well with parents, the fact that fewer know their students' hopes and dreams suggests that the communication taking place may be less about students' potential and more about students' problems. At all levels, communication among each group within the school community must be strengthened so that the purpose of teaching and learning can be fully realized.

DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT AND STAFF PERCEPTIONS

When comparisons are made between similar questions from the *My Voice* Staff and *My Voice* Student Surveys, interesting differences are revealed.

School pride, a critical element of the condition of Belonging, reflects a person's level of commitment to, and investment in, what happens at school. Only 49% of students agreed with the statement "I am proud of my school"—a number that stands in stark contrast to the 85% of staff members who agreed with the statement. This difference of almost 40% emphasizes the diverse ways each group views—and is invested in—the school environment. For the school community to work together to support aspirations, these numbers must be more closely aligned. All members of the school community must be invested in, and proud of, the school for it to succeed.

Relationships are key to this investment, and questions from the condition of Heroes suggest that staff need to do a better job of letting students know that they are important. When asked if students care if staff are absent from school, 83% of staff agreed that students do care. In contrast, less than half (45%) of students think teachers care if they are absent from school. How can it be that the majority of students don't feel that teachers care if they even show up? This is a shocking finding that needs to be urgently

addressed. If students don't think it matters whether they are at school, how can we expect them to show up, let alone engage?

There were also important differences between staff and students views of the condition of Fun & Excitement. Fun & Excitement is about being interested and engaged in one's work; the more engaged a person is, the more inspired they are to try new things and take on new challenges. Both teachers and students play a role in making school fun and exciting. Teachers set the stage for the condition through their enthusiasm, their creativity, and their passion for learning. Students respond by being actively engaged and emotionally involved in their school work. For the condition of Fun & Excitement to be in place, both groups need to work together.

The national data reveals that almost all teachers (96%) surveyed are excited to work with students—a very positive finding that should be celebrated. Students, however, don't see teachers as enthusiastic; just over half (56%) said they believe teachers enjoy working with them. An even lower number of students (38%) perceive teachers as having fun at school, despite the fact that 85% of teachers surveyed agreed with the statement "I have fun at school." Similarly, while 88% of staff say they like working at school, just half (49%) of students said they like being at school. These disconnects play a role in how students view their learning, as well as how they view those who teach them. If students don't believe teachers are happy working with them, they won't be inspired to engage with learning themselves. Educators must find other ways to share with students the reasons they chose to work in the field and the passion they feel for it.

The opposite side of the issue is whether students are having fun at school. Of the staff surveyed, 77% said students have fun at school. In itself, this percentage is worrisome because it means that many students are not seen as being engaged. Even more concerning, however, is the finding that almost half (48%) of students agreed with the statement "School is boring." The fact that one out of two students finds school boring does not mean that students don't like to learn, however. The data shows that 64% of students agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun" suggesting that two-thirds of students come to school open to the condition of Fun & Excitement. It is up to teachers to actualize students' belief that learning can be fun. This shouldn't be difficult, since 99% of teachers surveyed agreed with the statement "Learning can be fun." The challenge is to find new ways to foster the condition of Fun & Excitement in today's schools.

Part of the problem may lie in different definitions of what it means to make learning enjoyable. When asked whether teachers make school an exciting place to learn, just 31% of students said that they do. In contrast, 85% of staff said that students make school an exciting place to work. This is not surprising given most educators have deliberately chosen a career working with young people. However, the differences between these perceptions need to be examined. What else can teachers do to make learning Fun & Exciting? This condition promotes active engagement and is a critical aspect of the 8 Conditions framework.

Statements from <i>My Voice</i> Staff and <i>My Voice</i> Student Surveys which highlight differences	% in agreement*
I am proud of my school.	T = 85%
I am proud of my school.	S = 49%
I am excited to be working with students.	T = 96%
Teachers enjoy working with students.	S = 56%
Students have fun at school.	T = 77%
School is boring.	S = 48%
Students make school an exciting place to work.	T = 85%
Teachers make school an exciting place to learn.	S = 31%
I have fun at school.	T = 85%
Teachers have fun at school.	S = 38%
Students care if I am absent from school.	T = 83%
Teachers care if I am absent from school.	S = 45%
I enjoy working here.	T = 88%
I enjoy being at school.	S = 49%
Learning can be fun.	T = 99%
Learning can be fun.	S = 64%
*T-Staff S-Students	

SIMILARITIES IN STUDENT AND STAFF PERCEPTIONS

While there were a number of differences between the ways staff and students perceive the educational environment, there were also some similarities between *My Voice* Staff and *My Voice* Student Surveys. These similarities group around two of the conditions: Spirit of Adventure and Leadership & Responsibility.

Both students and staff have fears about sharing their successes with their peers. Just 59% of staff agreed with the statement “I am excited to tell my colleagues when I do something well”; a similar percentage of students (57%) agreed with the statement “I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.” These findings present a curious dilemma: if schools are to encourage students to succeed academically, why is there such reluctance among students to share good grades? Teachers need to do a better job modeling self-worth, confidence, and pride in effort and achievement. Schools must make it safe for everyone—staff and students alike—to succeed.

Part of developing this type of confidence is about actively participating in the community. Here again, there are some sad similarities between staff and students. When asked if they are comfortable asking questions in staff meetings, just 66% staff members agreed. The exact same percentage of students (66%) said they were comfortable asking questions in class. In other words, only two-thirds of staff and students feel comfortable actively participating in their community. This means that one out of every three staff and students does not voice their questions or concerns about what is happening or what they are learning. Staff and students alike must challenge themselves to be more engaged, contributing members of their community.

Staff and students were also asked two critical questions about being responsible leaders. First, they were asked if they see themselves as a leader. Second, they were asked if they think others see them as a leader. While relatively low numbers of staff (77%) and students (59%) see themselves as leaders, the most surprising similarity lies in the discrepancy between the number who see themselves as leaders and the number who think others see them that way too.

Of the staff surveyed, just 52% think their peers see them as leaders; 35% of students think the same way. In each group, approximately 25% fewer staff and students think their peers see them as a leader than see themselves in that light. Schools need to teach students about leadership and help them grow into those roles, but teachers and school staff are already leaders by virtue of their positions. Why don't they think others see them that way? How can these perceptions be better understood and, ultimately, changed?

Statements from <i>My Voice</i> Staff and <i>My Voice</i> Student Surveys which highlight similarities	% in agreement*
I am excited to tell my colleagues when I do something well.	T = 59%
I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.	S = 57%
I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.	T = 66%
I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	S = 66%
I see myself as a leader.	T = 77%
I see myself as a leader.	S = 59%
My colleagues see me as a leader.	T = 52%
Other students see me as a leader.	S = 35%
*T-Staff S-Students	

A CRISIS OF RESPECT

A final aspect of comparison between the *My Voice* Staff and *My Voice* Student Surveys reveals a crisis of respect. More alarmingly, it is a crisis of respect that staff appear to be unaware of as the following differences emphasize.

There are three aspects to respect in schools: teachers' respect for students; students' respect for teachers; and respect between peers. When asked if staff respect students, 99% of staff said that they did. While this is one of the strongest findings in the survey, it comes under question when compared to how students perceive the same statement. When students were asked whether teachers respect students, just half (54%) agreed. There is a tremendous gap between how staff and students perceive respect for students. Conversations around these differences must be held to better understand how staff and students are defining respect, and what behaviors and attitudes they associate with it.

Similar results were found in regards to questions about respect for teachers. While the majority (91%) of staff say that students respect them, students have a much different

view: just 39% of all students said that students respect teachers. Here again, conversations need to be held to decrease these differences and help each group better understand the other.

Finally, the lowest findings were in respect for peers; both groups said they respect their peers the least: 72% of staff agreed that staff respect each other and just 30% of students said that students respect each other. How can schools intervene in this crisis of respect? Without respect it is impossible to build strong relationships, the basis for the first three conditions, and the foundation of the 8 Conditions framework.

Statements from <i>My Voice</i> Staff and <i>My Voice</i> Student Surveys about respect	% in agreement*
I respect students.	T = 99%
Teachers respect students.	S = 54%
Students respect me.	T = 91%
Students respect teachers.	S = 39%
Staff respect each other.	T = 72%
Students respect each other.	S = 30%
*T-Staff S-Students	

CONCLUSION

The *My Voice* Staff Report reveals both positive and negative findings around each of the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference. While schools should be proud of their accomplishments, there is clearly much work to be done to improve even the most positive of these findings. In particular, staff perceptions of students, willingness to take healthy risks, and recognition of staff effort, perseverance, and citizenship must receive additional attention as areas staff report as especially weak.

The 8 Conditions—*Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action*—need to be in place if school staff are to set and reach their goals. The survey findings reveal that *Belonging, Heroes, Fun & Excitement* and *Confidence to Take Action* are perceived by staff to be relatively strong; the majority of staff agreed with the majority of statements in these conditions. In contrast, *Sense of Accomplishment, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure* and *Leadership & Responsibility* have mixed results with a number of statements receiving surprisingly low scores. If schools are to be places where teaching and learning thrive, these findings must be reflected on, discussed, and responded to by the school community. Listening to the voices of staff is a critical step in this process.

My Voice Staff Aspirations Survey: Academic Year 2007-2008

Condition	Survey Statement	Total in Agreement
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel valued for my unique skills and talents.	76%
<i>Belonging</i>	School is a welcoming and friendly place.	82%
<i>Belonging</i>	I am proud of my school.	85%
<i>Belonging</i>	I think bullying is a problem at my school.	39%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel comfortable in the staff room.	73%
<i>Belonging</i>	Students care about my feelings.	70%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel accepted for who I am at school.	83%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students care if I am absent from school.	78%
<i>Heroes</i>	I have a colleague who is a positive role model for me.	88%
<i>Heroes</i>	If I have a problem, I have a colleague with whom I can talk.	93%
<i>Heroes</i>	Staff respect each other.	72%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect me.	91%
<i>Heroes</i>	I respect students.	99%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students care about me as an individual.	76%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I have never been recognized for something positive at school.	16%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I feel overwhelmed by my workload.	47%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I receive constructive feedback from colleagues.	75%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I put forth my best effort at school.	98%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Our school celebrates the accomplishments of the staff.	57%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I am recognized when I try my best.	53%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Professional development is an important part of my educational growth.	81%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I enjoy working here.	88%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I am excited to be working with students.	96%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Students enjoy working with teachers.	79%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Students have fun at school.	77%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Students make school an exciting place to work.	85%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I have fun at school.	85%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Learning can be fun.	99%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	At school I am encouraged to be creative.	71%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	Building administration is open to new ideas.	62%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I enjoy learning new things.	99%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	Our school is a dynamic and creative learning environment.	67%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I seek out opportunities to learn new things.	94%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	Meaningful professional development opportunities exist in my district.	55%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.	66%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Setting yearly goals with my supervisor is important for my work.	59%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I challenge myself to do a better job every day.	94%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Staff are supportive of each other.	75%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.	11%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	My colleagues help me learn from my mistakes.	69%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am concerned my colleagues will resent me if I am too successful.	12%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am excited to tell my colleagues when I do something well.	59%

Condition	Survey Statement	Total in Agreement
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I see myself as a leader.	77%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	My colleagues see me as a leader.	52%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I am involved in school-wide decisions.	40%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I know the goals my school is working on this year.	73%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I actively seek out student opinions and ideas.	80%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I encourage students to make decisions.	95%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I think about others' feelings when I make decisions.	95%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can be successful.	97%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can make a difference in this world.	92%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I feel confident voicing my honest opinions and concerns.	60%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I work hard to reach my goals.	97%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I am excited about my future career in education.	71%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	Continuing my education is important for my future.	78%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I think it is important to set high goals.	96%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I feel confident working with students with special needs.	78%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	Central office understands the unique culture of our school.	41%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	We communicate effectively in our building.	47%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	I know my students' hopes and dreams.	67%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	Building administration is visible in our school.	77%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	Building administration knows my professional goals.	51%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	Building administration is accessible to me.	82%
<i>Administration & Communication</i>	I communicate effectively with parents.	83%