

My Voice Student Aspirations Survey

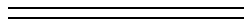
National Grade 6-8 Report

Academic Year 2006-2007



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The Role of Student Aspirations in Today's Schools

When students 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 learn algebra or a trade, get good grades or go to college, today's students want to be successful. Too often, however, students can't reach their future goals and dreams because the conditions around them do not support their desire to do so. As a result, their aspirations flounder and achievement wanes.

In order for students 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.* In order to measure these conditions in today's schools, the My Voice[®] Student Aspirations Survey was developed.

The My Voice[®] Student Aspirations Survey

The My Voice[®] Student Aspirations Survey assesses student aspirations by asking students to respond to 57 statements about the 8 Conditions, as well as demographic questions. Students respond to the 8 Conditions statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. By asking students how *they* perceive their school environment, My Voice[®] provides educators with a powerful tool for understanding both what motivates and inspires students to achieve, and how well students believe their school is meeting those objectives.

My Voice[®] Demographics for the National Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2006-2007

61,826 students completed the My Voice survey. One hundred two (102) schools from 18 states representing various sizes and socioeconomic backgrounds were included. Fifty-one percent (51%) of the students surveyed were male and 49% were female. Thirty-two percent (32%) were in sixth grade; 34% were in 7th; and 34% were in 8th grade. The participants identified themselves as being from a range of ethnic backgrounds: White—81%; Black or African-American—5%; Hispanic or Latino—5%; Asian—2%; Native Hawaiian—less than 1%%; American Indian or Native Alaskan—1%; Other Pacific Islander—less than 1%; and Other—3%.

My Voice[®] National Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2006-2007

The My Voice[®] National Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2006-2007 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 students who responded "strongly agree" or "agree" to each statement. The results are discussed in relation to key aspects of the condition. A brief conclusion and directions for further analysis are included at the end of the report. It is

important to note that there are additional gender and grade level differences to be furthered analyzed. Detailed reports on this data are forthcoming from the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA).

Condition 1. Belonging

The Condition of Belonging means that a student is a valued member of a community, while still maintaining his or her uniqueness. It is a relationship between two or more persons characterized by a sense of connection and support. Belonging is a necessary condition for students' well-being, social engagement, and competence. The condition of Belonging increases intrinsic motivation, for it fosters self-confidence and investment in the community.

Students' Perceptions of Belonging

There are two key aspects to the condition of Belonging in schools. First, students must perceive school as a community in which they feel connected, safe, and supported. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the students surveyed agreed with the statement "School is a welcoming and friendly place" with higher percentages of sixth (74%) than eighth (59%) graders in agreement. Fifteen percent (15%) of the students surveyed said they do not feel comfortable going to the cafeteria for lunch. Just over half (52%) of all students surveyed reported that they are proud of their school, though the percentages declined between sixth (64%) and eighth (41%) grade. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of students surveyed agreed that bullying is a problem in their school.

The second key aspect of the condition of Belonging is that students feel valued for who they are as individuals. Seventy-six percent (76%) of the students surveyed agreed with the statement "I feel accepted for who I am at school," while 14% said they have difficulty fitting in at school. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of students claimed they believe that teachers care about their problems and feelings, though these numbers decreased between sixth (69%) and eighth (49%) grade.

Discussion

The fact that so many students in grades 6-8 do not experience school as a place where they feel a sense of connection, support and safety may surprise teachers and school leaders who work hard to create a sense of community within the school building. If we are to reverse this trend and increase the number of students who feel connected to their school, we must ask students how they would foster a welcoming and supportive school environment. How can the cafeteria be re-imagined so it is a place where all students feel comfortable? How do students define bullying? If we listen to the voices of students and how they define the condition of Belonging, we may also see more positive results in the area of school pride which is felt by only half of the students surveyed.

Students' self-worth and connection to their teachers is another area of concern. The majority of students agree with the statement "I feel accepted for who I am at school." However, far fewer students believe that their teachers care about their problems and

feelings. While most teachers would claim that they care deeply about their students, it is critical that teachers express that care in ways that are meaningful to their students.

Finally, educators must look closely at the differences between sixth and eighth graders' responses to questions about Belonging. These percentages decline between sixth and eighth grade when students are asked about school pride, whether school is a welcoming and friendly place, and whether teachers care about students' problems and feelings. What accounts for these changes?

Condition 2. Heroes

Heroes are the everyday people—teachers, friends, family—in students' lives who inspire them to excel and to make positive changes in attitudes and lifestyles. Heroes are people students can connect with, those who have a positive influence on them, and who listen to and value their ideas. Heroes build trust in others and belief in oneself. Educators are by definition Heroes to their students who look up to teachers and school leaders as people to learn from and communicate with about many things. Building relationships with students through support, guidance, and encouragement enables them to become more confident in their academic, personal, and social growth.

Students' Perceptions of Heroes

The condition of Heroes emphasizes the critical ways teachers believe in, support and inspire students. In response to *My Voice*[®] questions about this condition, 63% of students surveyed said they have a teacher who is a positive role model. Approximately half of the students agreed with the following statements: "Teachers care about me as an individual" (53%); Teachers care if I am absent from school (49%); and "If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk" (51%).

The condition of Heroes is also about respect, not just between teachers and students, but students and one another. Forty-nine percent (49%) of students said that students respect teachers and 35% reported that students respect each other. Teachers fared better, with 68% of students agreeing with the statement "Teachers respect students."

The number of students in agreement with questions about Heroes changed significantly between sixth and eighth graders. When asked if they have a teacher who is a positive role model, 71% of sixth graders and 58% of eighth graders agreed. For the statement "Teachers care about me as an individual," 59% of sixth graders were in agreement in comparison to 49% of eighth graders. When asked if they think teachers care if they are absent from school, 57% of sixth graders agreed as opposed to 42% of eighth graders. In response to the statement "If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk," 60% of sixth graders agreed and 46% of eighth graders did. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of sixth graders said that teachers respect students in contrast to 60% of eighth graders. Similarly, 44% of sixth graders said students respect each other whereas just 29% of eighth graders said the same. In response to "Students respect teachers" 61% of sixth graders agreed in comparison to 39% of eighth graders.

Discussion

Student responses to questions about the condition of Heroes tell us important information about the ways students perceive their learning environment. First, although teachers have the potential to inspire, support and encourage students, this is not occurring in ways that students recognize. While two-thirds of students report that they have a teacher who is a role model, the fact that students have the chance to build relationships with so many teachers during a given school year suggests that this percentage should be higher. In addition, the condition of Heroes is about more than being a role model. It is about being an adult students can trust and turn to in times of difficulty. The finding that just half of all students surveyed perceive these characteristics in their teachers reveals an area of concern for educators to address.

The second point these results emphasize is that students perceive a severe lack of respect in their schools. While the majority of students say they believe that teachers respect them, the fact that just half think students respect teachers is very troubling. If teachers are in a position to inspire and support students through their learning, the challenge of doing so increases significantly if there is an essential lack of respect on either side. Most alarming, however, is that just 1 in 3 students believes that students respect one another. Students, too, are in a position to be heroes and role models to their peers. If this trend continues, the chances of such student-to-student support will be increasingly difficult to foster.

Finally, the fact that the number of students who respond positively to questions about Heroes declines between sixth and eighth grade is critical to examine in more detail. Across the board, fewer eighth graders say they have a teacher who is a positive role model; have a teacher they can talk to; and believe teachers care if they are absent. More eighth graders see respect as severely lacking between students and teachers, as well as between students and each other. These findings are worrisome and call for in-depth reflection and discussion among 6-8 educators.

Condition 3. Sense of Accomplishment

The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment recognizes effort, perseverance, and citizenship—along with academic achievement—as signs of student success. Educators have traditionally used a narrow view of accomplishment as it refers to innate ability, grades, or who is “best in the class.” The Condition of Sense of Accomplishment, however, views success in terms of personal growth and effort, not just class rank and test scores. Schools can celebrate their students’ accomplishments in visible ways.

Taking time to recognize and support students’ efforts will result in students who are ndinBDe is cri

Seventy-eight percent (78%) said that tests are an important part of their education though these figures declined between sixth (84%) and eighth (73%) grade.

When asked questions about their effort and perseverance, 12% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “I give up when schoolwork is difficult.” Conversely, 78% stated that they put forth their best effort at school with 85% of sixth graders and 73% of eighth graders agreeing with this statement. Sixty-three percent (63%) of students surveyed said that teachers recognize them when they try their best. More sixth graders (70%) than eighth graders (59%) agreed with this statement.

When asked about whether accomplishments are recognized or citizenship is celebrated in their school, 18% of students reported that they have never been recognized for something positive at school. Seventy-five percent (75%) stated that teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.

Discussion

Students appear to understand what schools expect of them in terms of academic achievement. Though these percentages could be higher, the majority of students report that they want to get good grades and that they understand the significance of testing.

While most of the students surveyed want to do well in school, they are not necessarily putting forth the effort needed to achieve: 1 in 10 students say they give up when they encounter difficult schoolwork. Four out of 5 students report that they try their best in school, yet only 3 out of 5 state that teachers recognize them when they try their best. The gap between wanting to achieve and persevering to meet that goal needs to be examined, as does the role teachers play in recognizing effort and perseverance.

The data also reveals that schools need to do a better job of recognizing student accomplishments of all sorts, as well as celebrating signs of good citizenship. Schools are very good at recognizing certain types of success—high grades, athletic ability, etc. Yet all students need to be recognized for their unique talents and interests, and middle level educators need to reflect on how to create this type of an environment. The fact that almost one-fifth of students say they have never been recognized for something positive at school warrants further discussion.

Condition 4. Fun & Excitement

The condition of Fun & Excitement is characterized by students being inspired to learn. They are actively engaged and emotionally involved in their school work. Students who exhibit Fun & Excitement are self-confident, curious, and prepared; they are willing to meet the challenges of the day. To foster this condition in schools, students need to be offered new opportunities, as well as meaningful challenges, that are connected with their individual interests.

Students' Perceptions of Fun & Excitement

Fun & Excitement is first and foremost about students being engaged in their learning. To be actively engaged in learning students must find it enjoyable and worthwhile. Forty-eight percent (48%) of students surveyed said they enjoy being at school and 59% said they enjoy participating in their classes. While 61% of students agreed with the statement “Learning can be fun,” 42% agreed with the statement “School is boring.”

The condition of Fun & Excitement is in part determined by a teacher’s willingness to foster this condition. However, students do not perceive teachers as especially engaged in the learning process. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of students agreed with the statement “Teachers enjoy working with students,” while just 40% agreed that “Teachers make school an exciting place to learn.” Supporting these findings, 47% of students agreed with the statement “Teachers have fun at school.”

The number of students in agreement with questions about Fun & Excitement changed significantly between sixth and eighth grade. When asked if they enjoy being at school, 57% of sixth graders and 42% of eighth graders agreed. In response to statements about teachers, 76% of sixth and 60% of eighth graders said that teachers enjoy working with students; 55% of sixth and 30% of eighth graders agreed teachers make school an exciting place to learn; and 55% of sixth and 41% of eighth graders agreed that teachers have fun at school. Thirty-two percent (33%) of sixth graders, in contrast to 50% of eighth graders, agreed with the statement “School is boring,” and 69% of sixth graders as opposed to 52% of eighth graders agreed that they enjoy participating in classes. Finally, 69% of sixth and 57% of eighth graders agreed learning can be fun.

Discussion

The most positive finding in this condition is the percentage of students who believe that learning can be fun. Though this figure could certainly be higher, its significance is clear when contrasted with the high number of students who are bored in school and the low number who enjoy their classes. The disparity between the finding that students believe learning can be fun, and the fact that so many do not experience that engagement in their school, must be addressed. Students are clearly the potential, not the problem. Middle level educators must explore more effective ways of tapping into that potential for engaged learning. The differences between male and female responses are also important to explore.

Students’ perceptions of their teachers’ engagement in the learning process are also interesting. Many students do not see their teachers as individuals who enjoy their work in the classroom or with students. Whether this is true or not, the fact that these percentages are so low indicates an area of professional concern for all educators.

Finally, the number of students who respond positively to questions about Fun & Excitement declines between sixth and eighth grade. Fewer eighth graders say they enjoy being in school, and more say school is boring. Fewer eighth graders say learning can be fun and fewer believe that teachers make school an exciting place to learn. This significant decline as students move through grades 6-8 suggests a crisis in engaged learning that needs to be addressed.

The condition of Fun & Excitement in schools is not about students laughing and playing instead of studying and learning. It is about students becoming so engaged in what they are learning that they stop watching the clock and looking out the window. These findings lead us to ask: How can schools foster this experience throughout the curriculum?

Condition 5. Curiosity & Creativity

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity is characterized by inquisitiveness, eagerness, a strong desire to learn new or interesting things, and a longing to satisfy the mind with new discoveries. Curiosity triggers students to ask “Why?” while creativity gives them the initiative to ask “Why Not?” The intensity of Curiosity & Creativity tends to diminish over time due to the habituating effects of the environment. Therefore, to sustain student motivation, schools must pay careful attention to creating learning environments that promote questioning and creative exploration.

Students’ Perceptions of Curiosity & Creativity

The condition of Curiosity & Creativity encourages students to experience the joy of exploring new ideas. When asked about their current learning, 71% of students surveyed stated that they enjoy learning new things. Sixty-six percent (66%) said that they learn new things that are interesting to them at school. This number was higher for sixth graders (74%) than for eighth graders (60%).

To foster Curiosity & Creativity, classrooms must encourage student inquisitiveness and demonstrate the relevance of studying new material. Questions about Curiosity & Creativity in the classroom yielded mixed results. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of students agreed with the statement “I feel comfortable asking questions in class.” Seventy-nine percent (79%) of students surveyed agreed with the statement “My teachers present lessons in different ways”; 67% agreed with the statement “At school I am encouraged to be creative,” though the percentage decreased between sixth (75%) and eighth (61%) grade. Just 45% of students stated that their classes help them understand what is happening in their everyday lives, though this number was higher for sixth (52%) than for eighth graders (39%). Eighty-one percent (81%) of students agreed with the statement “What I learn in school will benefit my future.”

Discussion

Questions about the condition of Curiosity & Creativity revealed that 7 out of 10 students surveyed like to learn new things and that a similar number say they learn new things that are interesting to them in school. While these numbers can be improved, they suggest an alignment between students’ hopes for school and the reality they encounter. Of concern is the fact that these percentages decrease between sixth and eighth grade.

In addition, students must be engaged enough in their learning to ask “why?” and “why not?” questions. Yet 3 out of 5 students do not feel comfortable asking questions in class. To foster Curiosity & Creativity students must also have the chance to be creative while they are learning. Ways to improve on the percentages in these areas should be discussed.

In terms of relevance, less than half of all students say that they see the connection between their current learning and their everyday lives. For students to maintain an active interest in learning, they must see the value in it. They must be able to connect what they are studying to their world in some tangible way that leads them to ask questions and seek answers. If we do not make learning relevant, we are failing our students no matter how many new ideas they are exposed to in a given school year.

Interestingly, 4 out of 5 students believe that what they learn in school is going to be helpful to them in the future. What does it mean that our students do not see school as relevant to their current lives, but do think it is meaningful for their future? How do we narrow this gap to ensure learning is relevant in the present?

Condition 6. Spirit of Adventure

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is characterized by students' ability to take on positive, healthy challenges at school and home, with family and friends. Students experience the Spirit of Adventure when they tackle something new without the fear of failure or success. When schools promote healthy decision making and healthy risk taking, their students become more confident and resilient. Students with the Spirit of Adventure see life as full of opportunities worth exploring for their own sake.

Students' Perceptions of Spirit of Adventure

The condition of Spirit of Adventure is about students trying new things. It is about students moving from their comfort zone to their challenge zone. Students face two common obstacles when they do so: the fear of success and the fear of failure. While 78% of students surveyed said that they push themselves to do better academically, 23% reported that they are afraid to try something if they think they may fail. In terms of anxiety around success, 4% of students surveyed agreed with the statement "I am afraid my friends won't like me if I do well in school."

Another key aspect of Spirit of Adventure is whether students feel supported when they want to try new things. Support can come in many forms, including teachers and other students. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of students surveyed believe teachers help them learn from their mistakes, with more sixth (77%) than eighth (61%) graders agreeing. In addition, 74% said that teachers think they can be successful. Peers fared less well: 44% of the students surveyed stated that students are supportive of each other, though these percentages were higher for sixth graders (51%) than eighth graders (35%). Sixty-two percent (62%) reported they are excited to tell their friends when they get good grades. More sixth graders (68%) than eighth graders (57%) were excited to share good grades with their friends.

Discussion

Whether students have the courage to move beyond their comfort zone into their challenge zone depends on overcoming fear and anxiety. As the data shows, one-quarter of students are reluctant to challenge themselves because they are afraid they might fail.

This significant figure should be of concern to every educator. For if students are not willing to challenge themselves—academically, socially, personally—they will not learn and grow as individuals. It must be as safe for students to have a Spirit of Adventure and *not* succeed as it is for them *to* succeed when they take a healthy risk.

Less obvious, though no less worrisome, are the students who are afraid to challenge themselves because they might *succeed*. For these students, having a Spirit of Adventure means potentially threatening their social network—their sense of Belonging—and is therefore a powerful deterrent to success. The fact that only 3 out of 5 students surveyed are excited to tell their friends when they get good grades underscores this point. If all students are to reach their highest potential, schools must find ways to make it safe for all students to take on personal challenges and succeed at them.

Finally, the fact that just 3 out of 5 students believe that teachers help them learn from their mistakes suggests that students who try something new, and fail, need more sustained support so they do not give up. Middle level educators must also explore how students can be encouraged to support each other's healthy risk taking so that all students embrace new ideas and challenges throughout their education. The drop in agreement between sixth and eighth graders is also important to examine.

Condition 7. Leadership & Responsibility

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility means students are able to express their ideas and are willing to accept consequences for their actions. It cultivates accountability for the classroom environment and school community. Schools which promote this condition teach and expect their students to be good decision makers. They provide legitimate decision-making opportunities, seek student input, and expect students to be accountable for their actions and words. Students are trusted to make the right decisions and are recognized for doing so.

Students' Perceptions of Leadership & Responsibility

The condition of Leadership & Responsibility is twofold: students 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 communities. When asked about decision making, 68% of students surveyed reported that they think about others' feelings when they make decisions. Sixty-one percent (61%) said they are good decision makers. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of students also stated that teachers encourage students to make decisions.

When asked about leadership in their communities just 42% of students reported that they know the goals their school is working on; 49% of sixth graders agreed and 37% of eighth graders did. Thirty-nine percent (39%) **stated that student council represents all students at school; greater numbers of sixth graders** (46%) than eighth graders (33%) agreed with this statement. Similarly, only 29% of students surveyed agreed with the statement "Other students see me as a leader." When asked questions about themselves as leaders, 51% of students surveyed agreed with the statement "I see myself as a leader."

Discussion

The findings in this condition reveal that although the majority of students see themselves as leaders, this self-perception does not necessarily translate into leadership opportunities and actions. This is most apparent in the fact that half of students said they see themselves as leaders, only a third believe that other students see them as leaders. For the condition of Leadership & Responsibility to thrive students can't just think of themselves as leaders: they must learn to be leaders in their communities, beginning with their school.

This discrepancy is further illustrated in the findings about decision making and leadership opportunities. While the majority of students say that they see themselves as good decision makers, less than half of students say they are aware of the goals their school community is working on. The decrease in percentages between sixth and eighth graders is also worrisome. Such disparity illuminates the challenges educators face in fostering responsible leaders in today's schools, as does the finding that only a third of the students see student council as representative of the student body.

It is not enough for students to see themselves as leaders and decision makers, however; they must put those beliefs into practice through real leadership opportunities in their communities. It is important to note that 7 out of 10 students believe that teachers encourage students to be decision makers, suggesting that the leadership opportunities available in classrooms might be a good starting point for school-wide initiatives.

Condition 8. Confidence to Take Action

Confidence to Take Action is the extent to which students believe in themselves. It encourages them to dream about their future while being motivated to set goals in the present. This condition is what educators strive for; all other conditions must be established and supported for students to attain this level of aspiration. Confidence to Take Action is characterized by a positive and healthy outlook on life and by looking inward rather than outward for approval. Schools can help build their students' Confidence to Take Action by providing support, celebrating diversity, and encouraging independent thinking.

Students' Perceptions of Confidence to Take Action

The condition of Confidence to Take Action is the pinnacle of the 8 Condition framework and also the goal of all educational ventures: to provide students 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, 76% of students surveyed reported they think it is important to set high goals; 84% said they work hard to reach their goals.

The ability to set and reach for goals is directly connected to a positive view of one's future. Ninety-one percent (91%) of students surveyed agreed with the statement "I believe I can be successful." In contrast, 79% of students believed teachers expect them to be successful. Seventy-seven percent (77%) said that they are excited about their future, yet just 55% agreed "I believe I can make a difference in this world."

Finally, when asked about the connection between school and their future, 88% of students surveyed agreed with the statement “Going to college is important for my future,” while just 72% said that their current schooling is preparing them well for the future. Greater number of sixth graders (79%) than eighth graders (67%) agreed that school is preparing them well for their future.

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 students surveyed appear to know that it is important both to set high goals *and* work hard to reach them. Yet almost a quarter of the students surveyed do not see goal setting as important.

Other troubling questions that arise from the data include: Why do so few students see their present schooling as relevant, in particular when compared to the higher percentage who see going to college as relevant? What does this tell us about students’ understanding of the steps it takes to reach the goal of attending college? The fact that 4 out of 5 students believe teachers expect them to be successful is a positive finding. Teachers play a key role in helping students believe in themselves and their abilities to reach their goals. How can middle level educators sustain and even improve on this finding?

Finally, while 9 out of 10 students think they can be successful, only half believe they can make a difference in the world. How do schools foster students’ belief not only in their ability to succeed, but in their ability to be engaged citizens who contribute to the world around them?

The Role of Parents

Parents play a critical role in supporting student success and 96% of the students surveyed think their parents care about their education. A similarly high percentage (91%) state that their parents think going to college is important. These percentages drop when students are asked if their parents like their school (67%) and whether their parents feel comfortable talking with their teachers (73%). Just 57% of the students say that their teachers let their parents know what they do well in school, and 53% state they would like their parents to attend more school events.

More sixth graders agreed with these statements than eighth graders. For example, 75% of sixth graders said that their parents liked their school in contrast to 61% of eighth graders; 68% of sixth graders reported that their teachers let their parents know what they do well in school as opposed to 48% of eighth graders; and 44% of sixth graders said they would like their parents to attend more school events whereas just 24% of eighth graders agreed.

The high number of students who believe that their parents support their current and future educational goals suggests that parents are an important resource for fostering student aspirations. Unfortunately, this resource appears to be overlooked as

significantly fewer students perceive that their parents' relationship with their school and teachers is strong. How can teachers and school administrators tap into this wealth of positive support for student learning? How can the connection between parents and schools be strengthened? Finally, what does the shift between sixth and eighth graders mean for educators and parents alike?

The fact that so few students think that their teachers share positive information with their parents is particularly concerning since this is a key line of communication about student accomplishments of all sorts. How can we be sure that teachers, who know better than anyone the types of successes students have, share and celebrate these accomplishments with parents so that all students feel recognized?

Conclusion

The *My Voice*[®] National Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2006-2007 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.

The 8 Conditions that support student engagement—*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 schools are to foster students' ability to set and reach their goals. Yet, as the survey findings reveal, these conditions are neither fully nor deeply integrated into our nation's schools. 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.

Directions for Further Analysis

The *My Voice*[®] National Grades 6-8 Report Academic Year 2006-2007 provides a snapshot of how students perceive themselves and their learning environments. However, more comprehensive analyses are needed to understand fully the implications of the data. For example, the findings must be viewed through lenses such as racial/ethnic difference and school difference: rural vs. urban, small vs. large, academically successful vs. academically struggling. More detailed reports on gender differences and differences across grade levels will be forthcoming. Additional factors such as how the schools are configured (i.e. k-6, 6-8, 7-8 etc) need to be explored.

As educators dedicated to positive reform in today's schools, it is our responsibility to explore in-depth the *My Voice*[®] data so that we can fully understand and appreciate how students perceive their learning environments. In doing so, we will gain insight into students' fears, frustrations, hopes and dreams. Only then can we take the next steps toward our goal of improving teaching and learning environments so that all schools promote students' self-worth, active engagement in the learning process, and a sense of purpose for all students.

My Voice[®] Student Aspirations Survey Questions & Grades 6-8 Results Academic Year 2006-2007

Condition	Survey Statement	Total in Agreement
<i>Belonging</i>	School is a welcoming and friendly place.	65%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel accepted for who I am at school.	76%
<i>Belonging</i>	I have difficulty fitting in at school.	14%
<i>Belonging</i>	Teachers care about my problems and feelings.	57%
<i>Belonging</i>	I am proud of my school.	52%
<i>Belonging</i>	I feel comfortable going to the cafeteria for lunch.	85%
<i>Belonging</i>	I think bullying is a problem in my school.	39%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect teachers.	49%
<i>Heroes</i>	I have a teacher who is a positive role model for me.	63%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers care about me as an individual.	53%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers care if I am absent from school.	49%
<i>Heroes</i>	If I have a problem, I have a teacher with whom I can talk.	51%
<i>Heroes</i>	Teachers respect students.	68%
<i>Heroes</i>	Students respect each other.	35%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Tests are an important part of my education.	78%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize students who are kind and helpful.	75%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I have never been recognized for something positive at school.	18%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I give up when schoolwork is difficult.	12%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Teachers recognize me when I try my best.	63%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	I put forth my best effort at school.	78%
<i>Sense of Accomplishment</i>	Getting good grades is important to me.	88%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I enjoy being at school.	48%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Teachers enjoy working with students.	67%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Teachers make school an exciting place to learn.	40%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	School is boring.	42%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	I enjoy participating in my classes.	59%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Teachers have fun at school.	47%
<i>Fun & Excitement</i>	Learning can be fun.	61%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I feel comfortable asking questions in class.	67%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	My teachers present lessons in different ways.	79%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	At school I am encouraged to be creative.	67%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	My classes help me understand what is happening in my everyday life.	45%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I enjoy learning new things.	71%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	I learn new things that are interesting to me at school.	66%
<i>Curiosity & Creativity</i>	What I learn in school will benefit my future.	81%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am afraid my friends won't like me if I do well in school.	4%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I push myself to do better academically.	78%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Students are supportive of each other.	42%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.	23%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Teachers help me learn from my mistakes.	68%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	Teachers think I can be successful.	74%
<i>Spirit of Adventure</i>	I am excited to tell my friends when I get good grades.	62%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	Student council represents all students at school.	39%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I see myself as a leader.	51%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	Other students see me as a leader.	29%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	Teachers encourage students to make decisions.	69%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I think about others' feelings when I make decisions.	68%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I am a good decision maker.	61%
<i>Leadership & Responsibility</i>	I know the goals my school is working on this year.	42%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can be successful.	91%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I believe I can make a difference in this world.	55%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	Teachers expect me to be successful.	79%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	Going to college is important to my future.	88%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I work hard to reach my goals.	84%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I am excited about my future.	77%
<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	I think it is important to set high goals.	76%

<i>Confidence to Take Action</i>	School is preparing me well for my future.	72%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents care about my education	96%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents like my school	67%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents think going to college is important	91%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	My parents feel comfortable talking to my teachers	73%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	Teachers let me parents know what I do well	57%
<i>The Role of Parents</i>	I would like my parents to attend more school events	53%