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Students Need 8 Critical Conditions for Success

By [John Wilson](#) on May 2, 2013 6:30 AM

Results have been released from the latest "[My Voice, My School Survey](#)" developed by the [Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations](#) (QISA) and administered by the [Pearson Foundation](#). Hearing the voice of students can be enlightening, and their views can be helpful in creating schools that are relevant and inspiring in advancing student achievement. The culture of a school is too often neglected but can make a big difference in student success.

According to this survey, this is what our students are telling us: 94 percent of our students believe they can be successful in school. Eighty-eight percent want to do their best in school. Ninety-one percent say good grades are important. Seventy-six percent have a teacher whom they see as a positive role model. It is clear that students are positive about themselves and their place in our schools. So where is the disconnect between these positive numbers and actual student performance?

The survey reveals some troubling responses about student perceptions of adult support and student engagement in the school experience. Only 42 percent of those surveyed say that students are supportive of each other. Fifty-five percent feel that teachers care about them as individuals. Forty-five percent say that school is boring. Fifty-three percent enjoy being at school. These numbers need to serve as a wake-up call that our test-driven, high-stakes culture is not creating the schools that our students deserve.

We can learn a lot from the Aspiration Framework developed by QISA that identifies [eight conditions](#) that can make a difference in the academic, social, and personal successes of a student. Imagine if we adopted these conditions for our students as a critical piece of changing the culture of school. I suspect those survey results that reflect badly on the relevance factor would change demonstrably. Can you incorporate these conditions and behaviors in your school culture as recommended by Quaglia?

1. **Belonging:** This may be as simple as using each student's name daily, greeting your students in an authentic manner, knowing your students' hopes and dreams, creating opportunities for collaboration among your students, and making yourself available to listen to your students individually.
2. **Heroes:** Giving daily words of encouragement, inviting graduates from your school back to share their current experiences in life, listening to students, attending students' after-school events to cheer them on, and instituting mentoring programs are all suggestions from QISA.
3. **Sense of Accomplishment:** Teachers can recognize the effort and hard work of their students, help students develop attainable goals, involve students in citizenship projects, create assignments whereas process is just as important as product, and allow students to self-evaluate their work.
4. **Fun and Excitement:** Asking students what their interests are in learning, giving choices and options, incorporating technology in learning, creating hands-on experiences, and connecting learning to students' passions and interests are all pathways to enhancing this condition.

5. Curiosity and Creativity: Some activities for this condition include allowing students the opportunity to solve complex problems, encouraging students to ask questions, creating open-ended assignments, incorporating the arts and physical activities into teaching, and designing homework assignments with students rather than for them.

6. Spirit of Adventure: Teaching goal-setting skills, modeling healthy risk-taking, supporting students when they succeed or fail, teaching reflection, and helping students develop courage to explore new opportunities advance this condition.

7. Leadership and Responsibility: To enable this condition, involve students in decision-making about their education, create a genuine student government program, hold students responsible for actions, solicit and listen to student ideas, concerns, and opinions and use student feedback to design and modify lessons.

8. Confidence to Take Action: Finally, QISA recommends that you do the following to strengthen this condition: support and guide students who are non-believers in their own potential, teach students more collaboration skills, provide a balance of expectation and support, teach students to think globally and act locally, and encourage students to be supportive of each other.

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations has been studying these issues for a long time. Its partnership with the Pearson Foundation has enabled its work to be **available to any school** ready to address these important dynamics in educating a student. We all need to champion positive school culture as an essential strategy for school improvement.

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