

IT'S TIME TO LISTEN: THE MY VOICE™ SURVEYS

“We do a good job of asking students what they know in school; we need to do much better asking students what they *think* and *feel* about their school.”
—Dr. Russell Quaglia

The old adage “all you need to do is ask” has never been more true. Yet how often are members of school communities—students, staff, and parents—asked how *they* perceive the school experience? When administrators, teachers, and students become full partners in schools, self-worth is deepened, everyone becomes more actively engaged in the teaching and learning environment, and a sense of purpose permeates the efforts of all participants. In order to bring about such communities of learning, educators must listen to students, staff, and parents and take seriously their perceptions of their school’s culture and climate. Among the many things that are measured in schools today, the voice of all participants must be at the forefront if positive change is to be adopted, implemented, and sustained.

For over twenty years, the staff of the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) has been asking students about their perceptions of their school. QISA’s My Voice Survey asks students to assess their school using indicators based on the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference®—Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action.

Surveys for students in grades 6-12, as well as for staff and parents, ask respondents if they agree with various statements on a five point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Younger students in grades 3-5 are asked to respond: Yes, No, or Sometimes. (Due to their unreliability, QISA does not use paper and pencil surveys with students in grade 2 or younger; rather, younger students are interviewed by trained QISA personnel.) The following is a sample of statements on each of the surveys.

MY VOICE GRADES 6-12

School is a welcoming and friendly place.
Teachers care if I am absent from school.
I have a teacher who is a positive role model for me.
I feel comfortable asking questions in class.
I push myself to do better academically.
I am afraid to try something if I think I may fail.
School is preparing me well for my future.

I am proud of my school.
Students respect one another
I enjoy participating in my classes.
Other students see me as a leader.
I believe I can be successful.
I give up when school work is difficult.
I see myself as a leader.

MY VOICE GRADES 3-5

People help each other at my school.
If I am upset, I can tell my teacher why.
My teacher misses me when I am absent.
Adults smile a lot.
I only raise my hand if I am sure of the answer.
I set goals for myself.

I feel important in my classroom.
I help other people at my school.
I like going to school.
My teacher listens to my ideas.
I am a good decision maker.

MY VOICE STAFF

I feel comfortable in the staff room.
Staff respect each other.
I feel overwhelmed by my workload.
Building administration is open to new ideas.
I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.
I am involved in school wide decisions.
We communicate effectively in our building.

I am proud of my school.
Students respect me.
I have fun at school.
Staff are supportive of each other.
I see myself as a leader.
I work hard to reach my goals.

MY VOICE PARENTS

I am actively involved in my child's education.
Teachers care if my child is absent from school.
Effort is just as important as getting good grades.
Teachers help my child learn from mistakes.

My child enjoys being at school.
My child sets high goals.
I feel welcome in my child's school.

When students, staff and parents are asked questions about themselves, and the school system, they tell us. Educators are not usually surprised by the findings, though they are often dismayed that what they think about school turns out to be more than just their own perceptions: other educators, and even students, tend to share the same views.

As students, parents and school personnel across the country share their voice and tell each other—as well as national policy makers—what matters to them ... we must listen. Listening gives us an opportunity to improve our schools from within ... an opportunity few schools have taken full advantage of, despite the fact that all we have to do is ask.