



QUAGLIA INSTITUTE  
for student aspirations

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## Aspirations Briefs

*A series of papers for those who  
work with students*

## The Aspirations Framework



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**Aspirations is the ability to dream and set goals for the future while being inspired in the present to reach those dreams.**

**– Dr. Russell J. Quaglia**

The Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations (QISA) believes that for students to have high aspirations, they must believe in themselves, be actively engaged in their learning, and see the connection between what they learn today and who they want to become tomorrow.

QISA is committed to helping schools foster students' aspirations so that all students reach their fullest potential and achieve the success they want for themselves. The Aspirations Framework outlines a way to recognize and develop students' aspirations, while trusting in the professional judgment of educators to decide what concrete actions are best for their school. The Framework is a research-based set of principles and conditions, yet does not provide a prescription for implementation. While QISA collects best practices and certain tried and true applications, ultimately administrators, teachers, and students must guide decisions about how best to realize the Aspirations Framework in their school. The *combination* of QISA's expertise articulated in the Framework and a school's expertise in their unique culture is what cultivates a learning environment in which all students are inspired to achieve their very best—personally, socially, and academically.

QISA believes that for students to have high aspirations, three Guiding Principles must be present: *Self-Worth*, *Engagement*, and *Purpose*. These Guiding Principles direct the development of educational experiences, from the individual classroom to the entire school building. Students who have aspirations believe in themselves, are meaningfully engaged in their learning and the life of the school, and work with intention toward their goals.

The Guiding Principles, in turn, are lived out through the 8 Conditions that emphasize relationships, active and engaging teaching and learning, and a sense of responsibility over one's own aims and goals. The 8 Conditions are: *Belonging*, *Heroes*, *Sense of Accomplishment*, *Fun & Excitement*, *Curiosity & Creativity*, *Spirit of Adventure*, *Leadership & Responsibility*, and *Confidence to Take Action*. The 8 Conditions make a difference because they help schools put into practice the three principles that guide Aspirations work.

## **Developing Students' Self-Worth: Belonging, Heroes, and Sense of Accomplishment**

*Self-Worth* begins when students experience a sense of Belonging: They feel like they are part of the school community while being recognized and appreciated for their uniqueness. Students also experience *Self-Worth* when someone in their lives believes in them. They need Heroes: people they can look up to, respect, and learn from. To develop *Self-Worth*, students also need a Sense of Accomplishment. They must be recognized as much for their effort, perseverance, and citizenship as they are for high grades and good test scores. As students build *Self-Worth*, they are more likely to persevere through difficult tasks and be inspired to take the steps needed to reach their goals.

## **Fostering Students' Engagement in Learning: Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, and Spirit of Adventure**

*Engagement* means that students are emotionally, intellectually, and behaviorally engaged in their learning. Emotionally engaged students experience Fun & Excitement by becoming so involved that they almost lose track of time. At the end of the lesson, they wonder, “Where did that time go?” Intellectually engaged students are not afraid to ask “Why?” or “Why not?” about the world around them. Curiosity & Creativity are alive in the way they learn, fostering inquisitiveness and a desire to satisfy their minds with new discoveries. Behaviorally engaged students have a Spirit of Adventure. They are not afraid to try new things, or to take on healthy challenges, regardless of whether they might succeed or fail. With *Engagement*, learning becomes important in and of itself.

## **Encouraging a Sense of Purpose: Leadership & Responsibility and Confidence to Take Action**

Schools must challenge students to think about their *Purpose*—*who* they want to become as well as *what* they want to be. To reach this goal, students need to explore what it means to have, and create, a successful and rewarding life. *Purpose* is about being responsible, accountable, and confident. To develop *Purpose*, students need the opportunity to assume Leadership & Responsibility in their lives. They must learn to make decisions and understand the consequences of their choices. When students have *Purpose*, they have the Confidence to Take Action toward a meaningful, productive, and rewarding future. They believe in themselves and are motivated to reach their dreams.

**In summary, the Aspirations Framework**—from the definition of Aspirations through the Guiding Principles and into the 8 Conditions—is a way of scaffolding the various, and at times disparate, initiatives and programs that many schools have adopted over the years. As an organizing set of common sense ideas, the Framework can help educators and students decide what practices, policies, norms, and customs support student success and which are a hindrance to that effort. The Aspirations Framework represents a return to a core belief that every educator holds: There is nothing more important than motivating students to achieve their dreams.