

## 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 J. 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 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. The following is a sample of statements on each of the surveys.

### My Voice Grades 6-12

School is a welcoming and friendly place.  
I am proud of my school.  
Teachers care if I am absent from school.  
Students respect one another  
I have a teacher who is a positive role model  
for me.  
I enjoy participating in my classes.  
I feel comfortable asking questions in class.

Other students see me as a leader.  
I push myself to do better academically.  
I believe I can be successful.  
I am afraid to try something if I think I may  
fail.  
I give up when school work is difficult.  
School is preparing me well for my future.  
I see myself as a leader.

## My Voice Grades 3-5

People help each other at my school.  
I feel important in my classroom.  
If I am upset, I can tell my teacher why.  
I help other people at my school.  
My teacher misses me when I am absent.  
I like going to school.

Adults smile a lot.  
My teacher listens to my ideas.  
I only raise my hand if I am sure of the answer.  
I am a good decision maker.  
I set goals for myself.

## My Voice Staff

I feel comfortable in the staff room.  
I am proud of my school.  
Staff respect each other.  
Students respect me.  
I feel overwhelmed by my workload.  
I have fun at school.  
Building administration is open to new ideas.

Staff are supportive of each other.  
I feel comfortable asking questions in staff meetings.  
I see myself as a leader.  
I am involved in school wide decisions.  
I work hard to reach my goals.  
We communicate effectively in our building.

## My Voice Parents

I am actively involved in my child's education.  
My child enjoys being at school.  
Teachers care if my child is absent from school.

My child sets high goals.  
Effort is just as important as getting good grades.  
I feel welcome in my child's school.  
Teachers help my child learn from mistakes.

When students, staff and parents are asked questions about themselves, and the school system, they tell us what they think. 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.