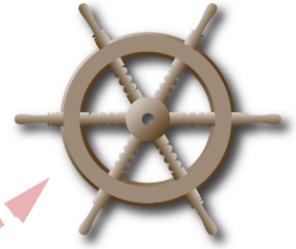




# Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



## Teacher Voice and Aspirations

by Betty-Jean Aucoin, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Development

Welcome back NSTU members to our 2016-2017 school/campus year. This is a special time of year as our members prepare their classrooms, schools, campuses and offices in preparation for the incoming classes of students. It is a time of optimism and aspiration that the new year will bring forth success for teaching and learning. Having high levels of aspiration support educators in meeting goals set forth for themselves, for their students and ultimately for the general good of the public. Unfortunately, we see too often that educators can't reach their goals and dreams due to the unsupportive conditions that surround them. Many reports done in past research and case studies showcase that teachers working conditions are students learning conditions. To improve the learning conditions of our students, we must in turn improve the teaching conditions of our teachers.

One study, *The Teacher Voice Report 2010-2014* developed by Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations and Teacher Voice and Aspirations International Center, discusses eight conditions that support teacher voice and aspiration. Dr. Russell J. Quaglia, a leading researcher in student aspirations identified the eight conditions which support aspiration and success. The eight conditions are as follows; **Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action.** It is important to note that similar conditions are needed to support student voice and aspiration. It was showcased in this study that teachers who feel they have voice and are empowered to make a difference are two to three more times likely to give voice to their students. A powerful correlation and one that should not go unnoticed as we prepare for the year ahead.

When educators and students have these conditions in place, successful teaching and learning happen. Unfortunately, we do not often see these conditions discussed or attended to in school improvement planning or in educational initiatives. To support members in discussions and actions of these eight conditions, an overview of each condition and a springboard question to assist you in your discussions and planning for the year ahead is provided.

**Belonging** was the first condition needed to support a sense of high

aspiration. Individuals who felt connected to their school community and valued for who they were as individuals felt a great sense of confidence and aspiration. It is important that administrators appreciate the participation and contributions of all staff members, valuing individuals for their uniqueness and appreciating them for their contributions. In turn, it is important teachers give that same sense of appreciation to one another and to all students before them. Therefore in the busy pace of school life, how can schools be more intentional in developing the sense of belonging and connection to the school community?

**Heroes** is the second condition. This condition reminds us of the importance of forming meaningful relationships with others in our schools and on our campuses. It suggests that we look to one another as trusted guides in aspiring for success through cooperation and collegiality; rather than competition and isolation. Education is a social enterprise and it is important to remind ourselves that we cannot and should not do it alone. This condition supports the showcasing of mutual care existing among staff members and among students. Your success is my success! How do we support the developmental shift of professional culture from one of distrust and keeping one's opinion to oneself to a culture of mutual dialogue and respect?

The third condition is **Sense of Accomplishment.** Long distance runners are known to be one of the most successful athletes in life. One factor that supports this fact is that they celebrate small successes on the way to meeting their ultimate goal. Celebrating accomplishments should go beyond performance reviews or scores on tests. It is about recognizing and appreciating effort, perseverance and citizenship. Staff who feel appreciated can persevere through the difficult times and prove to be highly dedicated to the needs of the school community. How can we as administrators and teachers take time out of our busy day to acknowledge others and support in the development of this third?

**Fun and Excitement** is the fourth condition in support of teacher and student aspiration. This condition supports the engagement and interest in one's work. If we find teaching and learning enjoyable, we will be more apt to engage actively, contribute more and be more effective. How do we support fun and excitement



NSTU members attending NSTU's Leadership Institute learn about teacher and student aspirations.

throughout the year to hook and engage teachers and students?

**Curiosity & Creativity**, the fifth condition, encourages staff to experience the joy of exploring new ideas. Teaching and learning environments should be dynamic and creative. Administrators, teachers and students should be encouraged to ask the questions, "why?" and "why not?" Too often we hear the lament that the silent, tacit nod is more welcomed than the willingness to interrogate realities in support of better solutions. How can we provide safe welcoming environments where we value the curious and creative mind of teachers as a vital part of the decision making process?

**Spirit and Adventure** is the sixth condition supporting aspiring minds and hearts. Valuing spirit and adventure allows teachers to take risks moving them out of their comfort zones. A school community that supports and encourages healthy risks also ensures that it is all right to make mistakes knowing that something will be learned from any experience. Many teachers fail to take risk in trying a new strategy, idea or tactic in fear of failure. Just as we need to encourage the spirit and adventure of our students, we also need to encourage this of one another. What supports exists in your school, campus or classroom in promoting new ways in support of innovation and growth?

The seventh condition is **Leadership and Responsibility.** Schools which support high aspiration of staff and students provide opportunities for shared leadership and responsibility. Shared leadership requires the participation and development of decision making skills among all staff so everyone

feels responsible to shared decisions in support of school improvement and student success. In this report, just over 50 per cent of the teachers surveyed believed they had voice in decision making. They saw a real disconnect from those who participated in setting policy to those who were expected to enact it. Schools and campuses need to tap into the valuable resources they have in the practical and professional wisdom of their staff. Otherwise, administrators at all levels run the error of confusing conformity with commitment. How can we increase shared leadership opportunities among staff and students?

**Confidence to Take Action** is the final condition to support optimism and aspiration in our schools. It is not enough to demand a better school system, a system that meets the needs of everyone without the confidence of our educators. Schools and campuses need to find ways to foster the intrinsic confidences of all staff. Taking the time to discuss these eight conditions, their implications within your school/campus and actions in supporting them is time well spent. How can you find the time to reflect on, discuss and move forward in support of the teaching and learning experience?

My aspiration is that you have all eight of these conditions present in your schools, campuses and classrooms. Until that dream is met, we are here at the NSTU to support you in the present. Best wishes to all members in moving forward this school year in supporting your aspirations and dreams and in turn confidence to support those of your colleagues, your students and your school/campus communities.

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