



***My Voice* at the White Mountains Regional High School: A Case Study**

Presented by the Pearson Foundation



© **Pearson Foundation 2011**



Introduction

This is one in a series of case studies presented by the Pearson Foundation to examine results achieved by schools using the *My Voice* Student Survey developed by the [Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations](#).

During the 2005–06 academic year, the *My Voice* Student Survey was administered at White Mountains Regional High School (WMRHS). After reviewing the survey results, school staff started implementing changes in how they interacted with students and each other. After implementing the changes, the *My Voice* Survey was readministered in the 2007-08 academic year. Results of this second survey indicated improvement in key areas that foster staff communication and student decision making.

A detailed explanation of changes made in response to the initial *My Voice* Survey results at White Mountains Regional High School is provided below. More information about the *My Voice* Survey is available online at myvoice.pearsonfoundation.org.

About the White Mountains Regional High School

School Profile

Former Principal:	Ryan Early
Number of Students:	501
Free and Reduced Lunch:	26%
Website:	www.sau36.org/WMRHS

White Mountains Regional High School is set amid the picturesque White Mountains of northern New Hampshire. The school's mission is "to form a partnership with parents and the community to prepare all students to become lifelong learners in a safe environment with high expectations so that they will become responsible, productive citizens in an ever-changing society."



Results of the WMRHS 2005–2006 Survey

WMRHS brought *My Voice* to the school to better understand their school culture and their students' general lack of aspirations. The *My Voice* Student Survey initially indicated:

- 22% of students said they were proud of their school
- 59% said that school was a welcoming and friendly place
- 43% said that their parents liked their school

Areas for Improvement

As an initial focus, staff worked on improving students' perceptions that teachers cared about and respected each student. The Aspirations framework approach – which combines short-term, personal commitments to do something differently today with long-term changes to policies, procedures, norms, and customs – was to begin by inviting teachers to consider what they might do to effect a positive change in their interactions with students.¹ Teachers began with simple changes:

- Greeting students at the door as they entered the classroom
- Visiting the cafeteria when not on duty
- Attending more sporting events
- Discovering what students were accomplishing outside academics (e.g., hacky-sack, ballet, ox-driving!) through informal conversations

At the same time, an Aspirations Team composed of administrators, classroom teachers, guidance personnel, and the school nurse began examining the school through the lens of the [My Voice 8 Conditions](#), asking questions such as: Which of our systems promote Belonging? Which policies get in the way of teachers being Heroes to students? What might we do to better celebrate all the accomplishments of all students and staff? As a result of that analysis, the team adopted several projects to improve aspirations:

- Improve communication through better use of email, the school website, and bulletin boards

¹ A key to QISA's approach as adopted by the school is that these initiatives were developed by the teachers at WMRHS, not imposed out of an Aspirations "playbook."



Areas for Improvement (continued)

- Increase teacher leadership through monthly *ad hoc* committees that study various topics as they arise – for example, poor attendance
- Change the master schedule to allow for more student choice and the creation of a common study period at the end of each day
- Develop a parent/community resource binder to create closer ties between the school and the surrounding community

Additionally, a team of students worked on improving the nutritional value of cafeteria food, increasing school spirit, and developing better respect for diversity:

- With the help of the cafeteria staff and a science teacher, the student team collected and analyzed one week's worth of cafeteria food. They presented the findings about calorie, protein, carbohydrate, and fat content to the school board. They respectfully asked that, given the sports-oriented nature of their school, a menu with a higher protein content be offered. The recommendation was unanimously accepted.
- The student team also held a Nationality Day. With money provided by the principal, students purchased flags from the ethnic countries of origin of all their fellow students and hung them in the hallways. A special potluck lunch was held, with students bringing traditional family meals.

The student teamwork instilled in them the confidence to take action. That the protein content of school lunches at WMRHS has improved is secondary to the fact that students doing research, making presentations to the school board, and following up with cafeteria staff brought about this change. This “Dream Team” has become a model of student leadership in the school.

According to Ryan Early, who was principal at the time, Aspirations work impacted all areas of school life: “*[We had] amazing results with regard to teacher voice, student voice, and parent voice. [It has impacted] student government, student rep to school board, parent forums, new co-curricular offerings, increased committee participation, and the hiring process. Turnover of staff has decreased, teacher advisors have increased, school pride has improved, student discipline has improved, new programming has been allowed, there has been a shift in the purpose of faculty meetings, parent groups have been created, transition plans have been effected, and much more. [Personally,] I intrinsically think about how every decision I make is linked and rooted in the 8 Conditions.*”



Results of the WMRHS 2007–08 Survey

These combined short- and long-term efforts of administration, staff, and students had the following measurable results in the 2007–2008 school year:

- 43% of students reported feeling proud of their school, including a near doubling of the number of males agreeing with the statement, from 26% in the first year to over half (53%) in the third year.
- 69% of students reported that school was a welcoming and friendly place. This includes a 27% increase in seniors' results from two years before. Where the trend in this indicator had previously been declining from grade to grade, it was now improving from grade to grade.
- 57% of students reported that their parents like their school – an increase of 14%. Moreover, the trend has leveled off from grade to grade, with agreement among seniors nearly doubling from 28% in year one to 52% in year three.

When a school's climate begins to change in a way that improves student aspirations, students are not the only ones likely to benefit. The following is a sampling of results to the *My Voice* Staff Survey given in the first and third year of the project:

TOTAL STAFF IN AGREEMENT	2005– 2006	2007– 2008	Percent Change
School is a welcoming and friendly place.	53%	91%	+38%
I am proud of my school.	73%	89%	+16%
Students respect me.	73%	88%	+15%
Our school celebrates the accomplishments of the staff.	36%	64%	+28%
At school I am encouraged to be creative.	62%	87%	+25%
I am involved in school-wide decisions.	27%	58%	+31%

In Closing

While these results represent just a sampling of changes in perception, and while there is still room to grow, it is clear the WMRHS is moving in a positive direction to improve student aspirations. Students and staff are becoming full partners in education in order to develop **Self-Worth, Active Engagement, and a sense of Purpose** in all participants.