

Foreword

Our education system is being driven by common practices rather than common sense. Practices such as strict schedules maintained by archaic bell systems and an overabundance of standardized tests, too often decided upon by individuals who have not worked alongside students in years, can be restrictive. The result is a hindrance of what naturally promotes passionate learning—a culture driven by trust, responsibility, and relationships; a positive attitude toward oneself and others; genuine collaboration with a purpose; and meaningful engagement. These are the cornerstones of passion for endeavors in real life, outside the classroom. Isn't that what we are preparing students for? What happens inside the classroom should emulate learning as it occurs in real life. Anything short of that makes *no* sense.

Creating Passionate Learners makes perfect sense. Authors Brown, Frontier and Viegut proficiently pull together the most influential engagement research as well as proven practices and share it in a manner that is readily applicable to teachers and school leaders. As someone who wholeheartedly believes in and promotes the importance of student voice, I must acknowledge my bias (albeit a healthy one!) when saying that the authors are to be commended for consistently looking at learning through the eyes of students. They recognize that students are not only important contributors to improving education, they are indeed the reason for improvement.

Brown, Frontier, and Viegut recognize the importance of ensuring that students are more than heard—students must be an integral, central part of the school improvement process. Throughout the book, they honor students as active participants in this endeavor. It is more than a symbolic role; students should

have a genuine voice in schools, with a meaningful purpose. Research conducted by the Quaglia Institute for Student Aspirations has found that when students have a voice, they are seven times more likely to be academically motivated. When students are motivated to learn, they become meaningfully engaged in their learning.

What is meaningful engagement? The answer is complex, yet the authors have tackled it by culling the rich bank of information in the field, ultimately developing the Framework for Creating Passionate Learners. At the core of this framework are *beliefs* that are determined by four prompts: the Growth Mindset (“I Am”); Internal Dialogue (“I Think”); Self-Determination (“I Will”); and Culture (“We Are”). The authors not only effectively achieved the herculean task of synthesizing the information, but they also communicate it in a way that is immediately digestible and applicable. The integration of anecdotes with practical suggestions ensures that teachers and school leaders can immediately address these four factors in their schools.

The need to address engagement is immediate. As I read *Creating Passionate Learners*, I reflected on my own work in education and considered how the lack of student engagement contributes to a participation gap—a gap of the mind, heart, and soul of the learner. How does one fill this gap? To be engaged and participate, students must experience fun and excitement in their learning environment. They should be so involved in their own learning that they lose track of time and space altogether, wondering how the class flew by so quickly. Students should be curious and creative, asking “Why?” or “Why not?” about the world around them, and then actively seeking the answers. Engaged students have a spirit of adventure; they are not afraid to try new things, regardless of whether they may succeed or fail.

With engagement, learning—and therefore participation in learning—becomes important in and of itself. The Quaglia Institute’s research has found that when students are deeply involved in the learning process, as characterized by enthusiasm, a desire to learn new things, and a willingness to take positive, healthy steps toward the future, they are *seventeen* times more likely to be academically motivated.

Creating Passionate Learners places students right where they should be—in the midst of it all, in the driver’s seat of

their own engagement, learning, and motivation. By honoring students as partners in the learning process and listening to student voice, Brown, Frontier, and Viegut challenge readers to work *with* students to increase engagement and ultimately erase the participation gap.

The ideas in *Creating Passionate Learners* underscore the importance of student-centered leadership in improving engagement. When schools recognize the critical importance of student voice and put into practice the Framework for Creating Passionate Learners, students will be more likely to have high aspirations. Students with high aspirations show marked improvements in academic achievement, social awareness, and positive contributions to their school community. When all students believe in themselves, are engaged in their learning, and understand that what they learn today influences who they will become tomorrow—only then will the larger goal of helping students reach their fullest potential be met. Education must be about more than preparing for tests. It must prepare students to be passionate learners for life. It just makes sense.

I offer great appreciation to authors Brown, Frontier, and Viegut for enhancing the understanding of student engagement and its importance in education. *Creating Passionate Learners* is a resource that will help drive change.

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