Beliefs, Vision, and Mission

# Creating a Clear and Shared Focus

In high performing schools, staff members find ways to address the underlying reasons and motivations for the work that is done in their schools. Schools and districts vary in the approaches for doing this.

At a minimum, school staff and members of the leadership team must have the opportunity to discuss and create a common understanding of the school’s role to help students become productive, educated members of society. Use the following questions as a guide for staff discussions:

## Belief Statements

What do we believe is true about the conditions that support learning? How have we seen our students learn best? What is the role of parents and the community in maximizing student learning? How do we go about incorporating new knowledge into our practices?

## Vision

Staff members respond to the following questions in writing or by creating a group of pictures on chart paper: “What do we want this school to be for students, their families, and our community?” “The kind of school I would like my own child to attend would…” and/or “I want this school to be a place where…” Urge staff to move beyond current limitations and look at the ideal situation.

## Mission

What are we going to do to assure that the vision is actualized? This should be a general statement that encompasses all curricular areas and speaks to the “whole child.” A mission statement usually incorporates an action verb such as “provide,” “pursue,” or “create.”

Keep in mind; you want your mission statement to be easily understood. Apply the “7-Eleven Rule”: if you met someone at 7-Eleven on the corner closest to the school, would they understand what you are trying to do?

Unpacking the Mission Statement

Look at the difference between the two mission statements below. Which one is able to provide evidence to measure the mission? Which one has a chance of unifying the school community with a shared mission related to student achievement?

Mission A: *To boldly go where no school has gone before.*

Mission B: *Our school provides a caring and supporting environment where staff is driven to help every student meet academic and social success.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| What We Say | What Data Measures This? | What further data do we need? |
| Mission A  *boldly go* | Staff members try new things  Average years teaching =22  (we persevere) | List of what we’ve implemented since 1995 |
| Mission A  *where no school has gone before* | We don’t think there are other schools like ours – we have kids from very impoverished homes and our parents are not supportive. We have a new superintendent every other year. Unstable funding | Need to look at demographics for our school and compare with some other schools across the district |
| Mission B  *caring and supportive environment* | Attendance  High parental attendance at conferences and curriculum nights  Teachers in hallways between classes | What do students and parents think - do we have a survey?  Teacher attendance data? |
| Mission B  *staff is driven to help every student* | ELL program  Home visits  After-school tutoring  Weekly conferences with students  Student goal setting  Daily intervention block protected in schedule | Disaggregated data that shows how our ELL and Special Education Students are doing |
| Mission B  *academic and social success* | Peer mediation program  Not many referrals for fights  Students are happy here | Referral data  Student satisfaction survey |

Adapted from “Monitoring our Mission,” Holcomb, E. C. (2004) Getting Excited About Data: Combining People, Passion, and Proof to Maximize Student Achievement. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Unpacking OUR Mission Statement

1. Write your mission statement below.
2. Write each individual part of your mission statement and put it in the “What We Say” column.
3. Write what data can be used to measure what is said in the mission statement in the second column. For example, “AIMSweb data show third graders are making steady gains in reading.” You may find that you need to gather more evidence to show whether what is said is actually happening at your school. Record that in the third column.
4. You may also find that your mission statement doesn’t adequately represent what is happening/what should happen now at your school. If this is the case, create a new one using ***Invent a New Mission Statement***.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **What We Say** | **What data measures this?** | **What further data do we need?** |
|  |  |  |

Invent a New Mission Statement

The true spirit of a mission statement is that it inspires stakeholders and provides a touchstone for efforts. It can be modified to reflect current stakeholders’ viewpoints and understanding. In other words, this year’s school mission may subtly change in subsequent years.

Here’s a guide for creating a current mission statement:

What is the ideal outcome of the school’s efforts? What, in general terms, do you want for students academically and socially?

What is the role of staff, students, and parents in making this happen?

Put these two things together into one statement. Don’t spend a lot of time *wordsmithing*; you will pass this on to the leadership team to create a simple statement:

Self-evaluate your product. How does your statement measure up on the rating criteria below?

Suggested Criteria for an Effective Mission Statement (5 is best)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The mission statement: | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Is short and sharply focused |  |  |  |  |  |
| Is clear and easily understood |  |  |  |  |  |
| Defines why we do what we do |  |  |  |  |  |
| Defines why the organization exists |  |  |  |  |  |
| Is sufficiently broad and general |  |  |  |  |  |
| Provides direction for doing the right things |  |  |  |  |  |
| Inspires our commitment |  |  |  |  |  |
| Says what we want to be remembered for |  |  |  |  |  |

Re-write your mission statement (if needed) to correct any deficit areas identified above.