

Model Secondary School Vision & Mission Statements

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The following is not necessarily offered as a substitute for any high school's existing expressions of purpose, but as a framework for understanding the general theory of organizational Vision and Mission Statements and their practical application in secondary schools.

VISION STATEMENT:

We, the faculty and staff of Ideal High School, envision a world in which our graduates productively participate as honorable, caring, socially responsible, knowledgeable, insightful, creative, wise, articulate, perpetually-learning, sincere, industrious, honest, just, tolerant, compassionate, generous, healthy and fulfilled citizens.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Our mission is to educate our students,

- to provide them with an accurate and timely vision of the social and physical universe as it was, is, and could be in the best and worst of circumstances,
- to open their minds to their own value in that universe and their hearts to the value of others,
- to prepare them to make near and distant life choices benefiting themselves and humanity,
- to inspire them to courage, integrity and self-sacrifice in the greater and most-enduring good.

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In recent decades, Vision and Mission Statements have been replacing the philosophical pontifications of corporate executives as approaches to focusing and driving organizational energy. These are formal statements of the organizations themselves, of each organizational culture, rather than the "voice of management." When more than public relations lip service, these form the core of a concrete operational strategy embedded in consensus among those called upon to implement or support it.

- "Vision" is about seeing the road ahead,
- "mission" about purpose, the reason for being on the road in the first place.

Officially stating them in words that can be operationalized in terms of goals, objectives, tasks, and performance measures provides a catalyst for genuine consensus and a steering mechanism for coherent organizational action.

These Vision Statement and Mission Statement tools are coming into vogue within educational districts, and showing up as obligatory elements of another recent phenomena, the individual school *website*. The quality of initial statements often varies, and web links to "vision" or

“mission” can lead to the old texts under the new labels. Still, they are now *visible*, and will evolve from website design element to genuine management tool as the public and educators together get *educated* on what vision and mission are all about.

The vision statement may describe what people *want* to see, or rather, *do* see in an *ideal* future, consisting of conditions they want brought about. It also may pragmatically describe realistic expectations, but still revealing optimal conditions potentially achievable with the contribution of some level of institutional effort. Functionally, there is no practical difference between the two forms of vision statement, although the former beats the latter in terms of generating enthusiasm for the prospect of facing the future. Both forms make clear what future conditions are desired, and that sets an agreeable basis for considering the yet-unspoken proposition about how to make it happen. (That will begin to emerge in the mission statement.) The vision statement invites people to look and see. Properly written, it does not intrinsically invite critical analysis or debate, as do the traditional pontifications of hierarchy now being displaced. It can also usually be stated simply and briefly, pre-empting distortion in the re-telling and interpreting within the institution or among the external stakeholders (including investors, consumers, and public interest groups).

Ideal High School’s vision of a “world in which our graduates productively participate” can evoke no rational argument of undesirability, nor rejection of it as at least an ideal (however imperfectly attainable) toward which all educational effort should be directed. It is about the future, and it’s important to resist the temptation to reap some PR benefit today. For example, words affirming the ability of students or staff certainly have motivational value, but issue a direct challenge and an invitation to cynicism to those who are already doubters. Vision and mission statements simply presume ability, but their function is specifically to provide clear direction and focus, the primary catalyst to motivation. They also enable both performance and accurate performance measurement, ultimately leading to legitimate *self*-affirmation.

The mission statement describes what the institution must do, *for its part*, to ensure that the vision becomes reality. The Mission Statement, unlike the Vision Statement, is limited to things that can actually be accomplished by the institution, and that accomplishment in turn defines operational success and the parameters for accountability. Neither the institution nor its members are held responsible for things beyond their control. Other institutions beyond high school, and other life circumstances, will educate and otherwise impact the development and worldly participation of Ideal High School’s graduates. Still, the vision of the future productive participation of those graduates being maximized by what they learn while at Ideal High generates the deductive logic underlying every word of the mission statement and then energizes every action in pursuit of mission accomplishment.

Ideal High School’s mission statement states the most obvious and fundamental truth about educational mission, and yet it is an obvious truth that many school mission statements simply do not state:

Educators and educational institutions *educate*.

That omission goes hand-in-hand with a great irony in this whole phenomena of American education adopting the vision-mission approach from American corporate management. Note that the Ideal High School vision and mission statements fundamentally define “education” as the process of giving students a vision and a mission.

*Long before “vision” and “mission” became management tools,
they were the sum and substance of education.*

They now work as institutional management tools precisely because they educate the members of institutions, individually and corporately, on how to be successfully contributing participants in those institutions. Education is all about giving students their own individual realistic visions of the universe – knowledge -- and their own sense of where they are going and what they are going to do on the journey. Secondary education educates students as entering members of adult society, individually and collectively, on how to be successfully contributing participants in society.

There are high-performing schools without formal statements, and even some with badly worded statements, which nevertheless appear to operate in actual practice as if at least generally guided by these for Ideal High. There are still other apparently low-performing schools with profound statements that, in actual practice, appear to be the mere lip service of public relations image projections.

Existence of those in the first category suggests that it is possible to possess a realistic vision and sense of practical mission without articulating it in express, formal statements. These institutions are apparently run by capable administrators, or perhaps driven by capable faculty despite the administrators. In either case, the administrators are not educators, or they would do the most basic thing that educators do; i.e., they would educate...

Those in the second category demonstrate that it is possible to follow one vision and mission set while expressing another. With respect to the attributes of the Ideal vision, institutions in Group One are not articulate and perhaps less than fully knowledgeable. Group Two school administrations contain knowledgeable and articulate writers but lack, at least institutionally, the expressed Ideal attributes of honesty and honor.

Every educator on the planet knows the mission of education is to educate students. Yet, there are published high school mission statements that do not say that, i.e., do not *articulate* that most fundamental of all mission elements. Likewise, educators would almost unanimously agree that *knowledge* and *being articulate* in both that knowledge and general communication are among the products of education, i.e., that are to be transferred to students by the process of education. This is to say they are knowledgeable about these things, but simply do not know they belong in formal Vision and Mission statements, i.e., that they are merely not knowledgeable about the particular matter of constructing these statements. That, however, implies the absence of those Ideal attributes – insight, creativeness, industriousness – that would have revealed this simple and obvious truth.

One way of looking at the mission of education is to encourage and enable in its students their own individual realistic visions of the universe and their own sense of mission, essentially summarized as to put more into the world than they will take out of it, and to live at least as fully for others as for self. This summarized personal mission is particularly reflected in the Ideal High School vision statement in the words, “productively participate” and “citizens.”

Educational institutions must practice what they preach, i.e., know and clearly articulate their own visions and missions. This belief is a concomitant of my own vision, its inevitable consequent being my own personal mission to educate those educators who undervalue institutional vision and mission statements.