

# ADVISORY

## WHITE PAPER ON VISIONING

by Christina Drouin

What is your dream for your school? What do you see when you look out onto the horizon, say five years from now? Do you see a school markedly different than today? With even more brilliant teachers and enhanced learning facilities? Or do you see a stronger and even more diverse global learning community beginning to have international impact? Has your vision taken into account the external forces – political; economic; social; technological; market size

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and behavior; constituent behavior and needs; potential new market entrants; direct competitors' performance, strategies, capabilities, and intentions – over which you have no control, but which can have a clear and serious impact on your school, and therefore, your future vision? To be a strategic vision, your look ahead must take into account these factors. And more.

As a vision is a picture of the future cast in the present, it can only be created when the school community connects the dots between the environment in which 1) it presently operates, 2) scenarios of possible future environments, and 3) its *desired* future environment based on its values and

core competencies. The resulting vision – an image or description of the school community it aspires to become in the future – is the answer to the question “If we could have the school of our dreams and the impact we most desire, what would be different about our school and our impact five years from now?”

Of primary importance in working toward a future vision is the right focus. Vision is what or where your school intends to be – its hoped for destination - not what it will be doing at the appointed time in the future. What's more, vision should indicate in what significant ways your school intends to be different than it is today. If there is no stretch, there is no vision. As the school community works through the process of developing a shared vision it will find the big answers to the big questions centered on the critical issues facing it. These answers are essential to building a strong sustainable community.

### **Distinction between Mission and Vision**

One of the most common questions we find when planning in schools today is: *We have a mission. Do we still need a vision?* The answer is a resounding yes! They are two sides of the same coin.

While a mission statement tells why your school exists, a vision statement tells you where you are going. It paints a compelling word picture of a desired future state. It can make anyone who reads it, hears it or lives it want to support, work for, give to, or in some other way be part of your school. When

taken to its highest level of effectiveness, a vision statement leads an organization to itself become visionary.

### **What about Core Values?**

But perhaps even more important than both vision and mission in anchoring any future plans are the school's core values. Imbedded in the heart of the organization, core values tell you what's important to its heart and soul. They answer the question "What do we stand for?" and are transcendent of boards, administrations, market conditions. As such, they are enduring and describe the ideals that are the bedrock of the school.

### **Feet on the Ground and Reach for the Stars**

Mission. Vision. Values. All necessary. And while they work together in the orchestration of a school community, each serves a separate purpose. Mission gives day-to-day relevance to work. Vision inspires stretching beyond what may seem possible. And core values knit together a community of soul mates, as guardians of all that it holds dear.

Good strategic planning always grounds vision in mission. Both emerge from core values. Visions, like dreams, will change as they are fulfilled. Mission occasionally changes to become congruent with a new vision. Core values rarely if ever change. Everything else, from goals and objectives to policies and procedures come and go over time.

The goal of any visioning process is to arrive at a *shared* vision. One that the community has worked together to create. Questions such as "What do you want to be true of the graduates of your institution during and after their school experience?" and "What do you want to be By completing the sentences "Graduates of my school will..." and "As a faculty/staff member I will..." individuals begin to paint a picture of future success and their roles in it.

When built on inclusivity, shared responsibility and accountability, the fulfillment of that future becomes the dream of the school community as a whole and of every one of its members individually.

A good vision statement:

1. Emerges from core values
2. Is grounded in mission
3. Paints a word picture of a desired future state
4. Is compelling
5. Is memorable
6. Is understandable
7. Inspires action

In truth, we have found that the very best vision statement does more than inspire, it actually gives people goose bumps!

So, what is your vision of the future? It is shared by your faculty, students, parents, alumni? A vision can be realized within three to five years of the completion of a strategic plan. Where will your school be in the year 2020?

