

Why Should We Clarify Our Mission?

“There is no point in thinking about changes in structure until the school achieves reasonable consensus about its intellectual mission for children” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1996, p. 295).

“Members of great organizations think they are ‘on a mission from God. . . [They] always believe that they are doing something vital, even holy . . . something worthy of their best selves. . . Their clear collective purpose makes everything they do seem meaningful and valuable” (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 204).

“In the effective school, there is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to the school’s goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. . . The issue of mission is one that must receive substantial discussion” (Lezotte, 2002, pp. 4-5).

“Contrary to popular wisdom, the proper first response to a changing world is NOT to ask, ‘How should we change,’ but rather, ‘What do we stand for and why do we exist?’ This should never change. And then feel free to change everything else. Put another way, visionary companies distinguish between their core values and enduring purpose (which should never change) from their operating practices and business strategies (which should be changing constantly in response to an ever-changing world)” (Collins & Porras, 1994, p. xiv).

The Wallace Foundation study of effective district leadership found that district offices that had a positive influence on schools and student achievement established clear purpose that was widely shared (Leithwood et al., 2009).

“The most deeply motivated people—not to mention those that are most productive and satisfied—hitch their desires to a cause larger than themselves. . . Nothing bonds a team like a shared mission. The more people that share a common cause . . . the more your group will do deeply satisfying and outstanding work” (Pink, 2011, pp. 131, 174).

Research examining successful schools reveals that they share the characteristics of modern high-performance workplaces that foster cultures built on teamwork and shared mission (Anrig, 2013).

A “persuasive and valuable” mission statement “gives people a context for their” actions and empowers them “to support one another’s efforts” and fully engage their talents and imagination (Halvorson, 2014, p. 38).

“Leaders need the ability to develop a shared moral purpose and meaning as well as a pathway for attaining that purpose. . . Great leaders connect others to the reasons they became educators—their moral purpose” (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, p. 17).

Educators who believe that merely clarifying or reaffirming their mission will somehow improve results are certain to be disappointed. In fact, in many schools, developing a mission statement has served as a substitute, rather than a catalyst, for meaningful action. Merely drafting a new mission statement does not automatically change how people act, and therefore writing a mission statement does nothing to close the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

References

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