

1. Determine the phases of creating a shared school vision, mission and goals that emphasize learning for all students and are consistent with that of your school district, including strategies and timelines for implementation.

If any leader wishes to be effective, his or her vision must be one that is shared among all players in the organization. This is certainly the case with schools. Green (2009) writes that “instructional leaders are defined as individuals who have developed a vision of high standards of learning and effective communication skills” (p. 198). Therefore, a shared school vision must certainly begin with effective communication. Without it, there can be no organizational unity, and there will certainly be a lack of clearly defined direction. However, with effective dialogue, particularly *collaborative* dialogue, change in school culture can be affected, and a shared vision can be formed. As a result, if I were a principal, I would certainly begin by implementing a participatory model of decision making, with an emphasis on open and candid dialogue. This is a common theme within effective, high-achieving schools, and, it must be pointed out, is a must for any leader who wishes to ensure that the school has the capacity for the desired change. Green (2009) also points out that “people generally support change efforts if they believe current conditions are improving. However, they must also believe that achieving the vision will improve current conditions and that the desired change is realistic, clearly outlined, achievable, and cost-effective” (p. 204). Only a climate of effective, collaborative communication can enable this to happen, and implementation of such a plan can begin immediately.

Once the lines of communication are opened, it is essential for an entire faculty to engage in meaningful data analysis. A shared vision is only as good as the goals that it sets forth, and, just as importantly, the methods proposed to meet those goals. Corcoran and Silander (2009) contend that, while many high schools have encouraged teacher collaboration and professional

learning communities, most continue with an isolated approach to instruction that has remained largely unchanged for decades. They maintain that in order affect meaningful change in high schools, new perceptions of teaching and learning must be adopted. In fact, their research indicates that communication among teachers and students in the classroom setting is an essential ingredient of effective instruction. Even more important is their finding regarding adaptive instruction, where teachers use frequent formative assessment to tailor their teaching to individual student needs. Unfortunately, their findings indicate that this is currently the exception rather than the rule. As a result, they insist that greater emphasis must be placed on non-traditional instructional methods. Therefore, as a principal, I would, again with open communication and collaboration, encourage a spirit of innovation in classroom practices. I would use school data to reinforce this by looking, not simply at the data, but at the instructional practices that yield the data. Teaching *harder*, or more vigorously, is not usually the answer. For instance, if the data indicates that our school is struggling in mathematics, the instructional methods should be examined. In our current climate of standards driven instruction, it is very likely that we are teaching the *right* things, but that we are not teaching them the *right* way. This is very frustrating for teachers who generally, according to Corcoran and Silander (2009), want their students to succeed. For this reason, after thorough data analysis, I would have these teachers inspect their own practices. Then, we would collaboratively explore other methods. Additionally, I would ask them to make suggestions for meaningful professional development, so that they might be equipped with the necessary professional tools to be successful, and help their students be successful. I would also point out that all of this can only occur in an open atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration, so that the teachers will not feel they are being blamed, and so they will not be afraid to innovate. This will allow all teachers to feel a sense of

ownership in the educational program of our school, thus making them more likely to buy into it, and less likely to feel that changes are being mandated. In other words, I want them to believe it was their idea, and when we achieve the success we seek, I want them to feel the sense of professional satisfaction and accomplishment. Like the participatory model of decision-making, meaningful data analysis would begin immediately and be ongoing.

It is imperative that the standard for the new shared vision be one of excellence that emphasizes the complete education of every student (Green, 2009). Unfortunately, there is research indicating that this is often not the case in our current educational system. In fact, in many schools and departments where students are tracked, students in more advanced classes receive better and more rigorous instruction, and usually from the best teachers in the school. Students in these classes sense the high expectations, and, in turn, they have high expectations of themselves. However, students in lower tiered classes receive slower-paced, less rigorous instruction, often from inferior teachers, that focuses more on rote skills. In turn, they have lower expectations of themselves (Pickens & Eick, 2009). Bolstering this contention, Ruggieri (2008) points out that we usually fail to allow for metacognition in our instructional practices. She says that “allowing students to think about what they are learning and how they are learning it takes time” (¶ 1). Such practices have to be seen as unacceptable. If a school is to become a high achieving school, the standard for all students must be one of excellence. So, as principal, I would convey this to my faculty. I would ask them, after having thoroughly examined data, to realistically diagnose our current condition. Then, we would collaboratively determine where we should be, keeping the focus on attaining excellence. It is essential that all of the teachers understand and accept this standard, so I have to make sure of this. This is the only way to ensure that *all* of our students will receive the best education possible (Green, 2009).

Depending on the response of the faculty to my initial changes, I would likely wait until my second year as principal to begin this formally. However, I would encourage the teachers, through data analysis, to reflect on their teaching and their perception of the school, as well as to constantly look for ways to improve the school.

Once the faculty has determined the standard and goals for our school, the real task of addressing how to meet that standard must be undertaken. Once again, when using a participatory model, this will be decided collectively by the faculty and administration. It is critical that this step involve all stakeholders. I would have faculty members to assist in the implementation, having them oversee their areas of expertise. These would likely, but not exclusively, include department heads. Also, I would form a parent council with a diverse group of parents to inform and assist in decision-making. Eventually, I would even like for the parent council to assist in forming a parent-teacher organization at our school, because there is not one currently (Green, 2009). This would also begin in the second year, as soon as the standard and goals are in place.

Finally, ongoing monitoring and data analysis must be done. It is not enough to simply form and begin to implement the shared vision; we must follow through. This requires constant reflection on, and evaluation of, standards and strategies. Data must be continually gathered and analyzed. A high achieving school is never a stagnant school. Therefore, as principal, I would not hesitate to make changes and adjustments when data indicates that they are necessary, because significant change is not a one-step process. Meaningful, effective change is an ongoing process, and it is certainly a learning process. With the help of the faculty and staff, we could learn a great deal from one another, drawing on one another's experience and expertise, to provide an excellent and equitable education for all of our students (Green, 2009).

2. *Identify the demographics of your school population and school community and determine the significance of this data to the instructional program.*

Johnson County High School's student population is 46 percent female, and 54 percent male. There are very few minority students attending Johnson County High School. 0.5 percent are African American, 0.1 percent are Asian-Pacific Islander, 1.3 percent are Hispanic, 0.5 percent are Native American/Alaskan, and 97.5 percent are White. An overwhelming 73 percent of our students are classified as economically disadvantaged. This is our key demographic, and is clearly the one that substantially impacts our instructional program. For various reasons, such as geographic isolation and lack of economic opportunity, Johnson County continues to lack cultural diversity (Tennessee Department of Education report card, 2009).

Research indicates that girls and students of high socioeconomic status generally perform higher academically than boys and students of low socioeconomic status (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). Having 54 percent boys and 73 percent socioeconomically disadvantaged, Johnson County High School certainly faces a challenge. This has, unfortunately, had a negative impact on the instructional program in my opinion, because expectations have dropped over time, so that *perceived* achievement can remain high. In other words, maintaining the status quo has been the prevailing attitude. That is why, as I mentioned in response to question one, high standards of excellence must be established and maintained for all students. This is supported by research indicating that socioeconomic status, while a strong indicator, is not the only indicator. In fact, according to Tajalli and Opheim (2005), teacher experience level and teacher salary had a profound effect on school performance. This reinforces the perception that schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas pay substantially less than surrounding schools and, therefore, have difficulty keeping teachers. As a result, quality teachers with substantial

experience are a luxury these schools usually cannot afford. This is actually encouraging in way, however, because it is much better than believing that there is nothing that can be done to help such students. On the contrary it would seem that, although their socioeconomic status does put them at a disadvantage, this problem has historically been exacerbated by subpar instruction brought on by subpar teacher pay rates. This has certainly been an issue at Johnson County High School.

3. Identify at least two specific actions or behaviors that new administrators would be wise to consider upon moving into a new leadership position.

As highlighted in my previous responses, I believe that it is critical for any new administrator to employ a participatory model of decision-making. Shared decision making has been shown to greatly enhance positive educational outcomes. In fact, it is indispensable in developing a shared vision. Without it, the vision, regardless of its merits, will be perceived as one imposed by the administrator, and perceived as a threat to the status quo (Green, 2009). In order to effectively use such a model, a leader must be charismatic and skilled in fostering meaningful relationships with members of the faculty. This will simultaneously increase the leader's influence, while enabling faculty members to feel a "sense of ownership in organizational success" (Leech & Fulton, 2008, ¶ 15). The practice of shared decision-making also enables faculty members to act, further enhancing their sense of ownership, and making them more likely to buy into the vision. It is also important to note that, as a leader strives to incorporate such practices as he or she endeavors to affect school culture, the leader must model and exemplify the desired behaviors. Titles are just that, but behavior is the key factor by which the leader will ultimately be judged. Finally, it is also essential that the leader serve as an encourager. As the goals of the shared vision are realized, the leader must congratulate and

celebrate the accomplishments of both individuals and the collective body of the organization. All of these are key elements of successfully implementing a participatory model of decision-making (Leech & Fulton, 2008). As I, a teacher of 12 years, project myself into a position of leadership, I cannot help but believe that such practices are of *particular* importance for one who would likely be perceived as *quite young* for the position by a faculty with many members having in excess of 20, and in several cases 30, years experience.

In connection to this, I believe that it is of paramount importance that a new administrator be a model of impeccable integrity. Without such integrity, any efforts to gain influence by building relationships will be undermined. It is impossible to gain the respect that every effective leader has without such integrity. Conversely, Sparks (2009) asserts that “leadership development supports leaders' ability to act with high levels of integrity so that their words and actions are widely and deeply respected” (¶ 11). Mills (2006) points out that school administrators almost constantly face ethical concerns, and that they must be especially vigilant because “they deal essentially with people rather than a product” (¶ 2), and “they may also be looked upon to guide and advise teachers, students, and parents regarding ethical issues as well” (¶ 2). This further highlights the imperative nature of integrity and ethics for administrators, especially new administrators trying to affect school culture.

In conclusion, I believe that a new administrator, facing the challenge of needing to change the current environment and climate of a school, must be skilled and charismatic. The leader certainly cannot afford to neglect the vast resources of the faculty, and can only access those resources through shared decision-making and consistently modeling ethical behavior and integrity. As eloquently stated by Sparks (2009), “because what leaders understand, say, and do

each day matters, I believe that the kind of learning I have described is a matter of the utmost importance and urgency” (¶ 19).

Resources

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Exemplary paper!

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