

Mission and Vision in Forty-Five Minutes

1. Gather all staff members and clearly establish the target and criteria for success for the next forty-five minutes.

- › *Example target*—At the end of the meeting, we will have mission and vision statements that everyone can support and carry out.
- › *Example success criteria*—Everyone can remember and recite the agreed-on mission and vision statements.

For clarity's sake, the agreed-on mission and vision statements will be as free from educational jargon as possible.

Going forward, all interactions with students and stakeholders will reflect the agreed-on mission and vision statements.

2. Place staff in groups cutting across departments, grade levels, and job categories. Doing this breaks up cliques and establishes a whole-district or whole-school understanding of the work. After choosing groups, the leader should pay special attention to balance the groups. Staff members who may be negative should be placed in groups with a staff member who will be positive. Staff who tend to dominate conversations should be in a group with staff members who tend to ensure all voices are heard. Balance is the key word for these groups. The groups will start their work with the mission statement.
3. Once settled, staff get sixty seconds to write down a disposition they would like for their child, grandchild, niece, or nephew to have when that child is done with high school. If a staff member does not have any of these connections, he or she can picture a former student. For example, staff may write down *happy, ready for the world, capable, or able to do whatever they desire*. The key is for the disposition to be short, free of excessive commas, and meaningful.
4. Teams share the dispositions they have written and then vote on the their favorite one. If teams are really struggling with a couple of the dispositions they really like, a leader can allow them to share both. However, he or she must keep in mind the goal is to create something short, meaningful, and easily remembered.
5. The agreed-on dispositions are shared out to the room. The leader records the dispositions on note cards that are taped up or pinned to a wall for all to see. The recommendation to use note cards here is for ease of movement later in the process.
6. Staff then discuss if any of the dispositions can be combined with like ideas. A leader may have ten cards on the wall at the start of this process, but combining cards that say *follow their passion* with ones that read *do what they love* and *excited for life* can quickly reduce the number of cards.

7. When the cards are fewer, each staff member gets one vote. The vote mechanism can be a round colored sticker or a small star sticker. Staff are then invited to place their value vote on *one* card. The stickers are used for a concrete, visually obvious record that demonstrates the will of the group. One or two cards will emerge as clear favorites. If this is not the case following the first balloting, then the dispositions clearly not among the favorites can be eliminated and the voting can happen again. If there are two favorites—for example, one card has twenty-one votes another has eighteen and the remaining fifteen votes are dispersed across six cards—can the favorites be combined into one statement?
8. Use the favorite disposition to quickly write a draft mission statement. The leader should remember that the staff are creating a mission: the fundamental purpose for the organization. After participants create the rough-draft statement, the leader should ask if they can live with the statement. If everyone assents, the leader should tell the staff that the leadership team may wordsmith the disposition a little, but they are moving on to the vision statement. The key point here is to ask staff members if they *can live with* the proposed mission statement, not necessarily if they agree 100 percent with every variation of it. Asking for total agreement can lead to nitpicking of language, but general assent to a greater idea will keep the meeting moving forward without being distracted by the minutiae of semantics. Next, the leader will guide the groups on to creating the vision statement.
9. The leader poses the question, “What is one thing we need to do to make the mission statement we just agreed on come true?” The leader then goes back through the process, this time with staff focusing on what they need to do to bring their vision of a compelling future for all students to fruition. Ideas come from the groups, the groups record them on the cards, they combine the cards, and staff vote on which ideas will instill in all students the vital disposition they agreed to. This time the leader may want to accept the top two or three ideas if the group can make them into a memorable statement. For example, if the top three cards say *collaborate*, *support students’ emotional wellbeing*, and *high expectations*, the vision statement can be: *through collaboration, Mary Snitly Middle School will hold all students to high academic expectations while supporting their emotional wellbeing*. Although this statement dances dangerously close to bingo-card territory, by limiting the statement to three ideas, it becomes more memorable and therefore more meaningful. If a leader wants to steer entirely clear of complicated structure and language, the following statement covers the same ground in different language: *the staff at Mary Snitly Middle School will work together to ensure all students learn at high levels while feeling safe and loved*.
10. Share new mission and vision statements; review the meeting target and success criteria.
 - › *Example new mission statement*—“Every student will leave Mary Snitly Middle School with the skills needed to do what he or she loves.”
 - › *Example new vision statement*—“The staff at Mary Snitly Middle School will work together to ensure all students learn at high levels while feeling safe and loved.”

- › *Example target review*—At the end of the meeting, Mary Snitly Middle School will have mission and vision statements that everyone can support and carry out; did we accomplish that?
- › *Example success criteria review*—Can everyone remember and recite the agreed-on mission and vision statements? If so, do it now.

Are the agreed-on mission and vision statements as free from educational jargon as possible?

From this meeting forward can all interactions with students and stakeholders reflect the agreed-on mission and vision statements?

11. Thank everyone for coming and participating in the mission and vision meeting. Let everyone know the next step is creating collective commitments (see chapter 3, page 43) so they can all commit to making these statements come true.
12. After the meeting, the leader needs to share the new mission and vision for the school. Verbiage on the website may need to be changed, email signatures need to be adjusted, and so on.