Developing a Shared Vision and Mission

*Everyone takes the limits of his own vision for the limits of the world.*

— Arthur Schopenhauer

**Vision (n.): The state of seeing what could be.**

As Schopenhauer noted, a collective vision is almost always more powerful than that of a single person. People come from many different places and backgrounds and often have strong beliefs. In order to create a school environment in which student achievement is at the forefront, the school professionals must come to terms with basic agreement on:

- What they believe
- What they want the results to look like
- How they are going to get there

This three-step process includes discovering values, developing a vision and identifying a mission. In other works, to effectively plan an effective school, it is important for everyone to first understand what you believe (your values), what you want the end result to be for your students (your vision) and how the school community can organize to get there (your mission).

Ideally, all school professionals should be included in the process or the vision will not be truly shared.
5.1 Developing a Shared Vision

If possible, this exercise should be distributed prior to the group session in order to ensure thoughtful responses to the questions. This is not a quick process and might require one or two full days to develop a sense of mission and vision for the school.

Exercise

1. Make a list of your core values as they relate to education. What really matters, and why? (An example is provided.) Participants should include at least three examples of values and beliefs that can be directly affected by effective school counselors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Value or Belief</th>
<th>Why This is Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex. All children can learn and achieve at a high level.</td>
<td>Once we accept that all students are capable of excelling, we can no longer sit back comfortably if large numbers are failing.</td>
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2. Selecting completed forms at random, discuss the values presented. If principals and counselors from multiple schools are participating, divide into groups, mixing principals and school counselors. Assign completed worksheets at random, and discuss the values. Ask these questions:
   - Should this be a core value of our school?
   - How does this value or belief affect our students? Our staff? Our community?
   - Is there currently widespread belief in this value in the school? In the community?
   - How can we get buy-in from the key stakeholders — Including the community, parents, district supervisors, principals, counselors, teachers, other staff — and students?

3. Following your discussions, take a fresh belief chart and, working as a team, define your core beliefs and values, and describe why they are important to the school.

A note on developing shared values. In order to develop values that are truly shared, a “safe” atmosphere is required. That is, all participants must feel that they are able to present their views without fear of repercussions, blame or belittlement. Principals must take care to not dominate the discussion — it would be good practice to have principals speak after other team members whenever possible. And everyone on the team should be heard and should listen.