Running head: Vision of Learning

School Vision of Learning: Urban Setting

Tiffany A. Guy

March 26, 2010

Abstract

In this paper, the author develops her school vision of learning. She explains the theories she used to help develop the vision. The author then goes into detail on the methods she will use to make her vision for a school that prepares urban students for a successful life after high school. She takes into account all the stakeholders and how they can help in her implementation of the vision.

School Vision of Learning

**Vision**

Teaching at a middle and high school in a large urban district for my entire career, there are a lot of things that I have noticed about the students, the schools, and the district as a whole. The thing that stands out the most to me is the disconnection the students have from their education. Many of the students I have met and taught throughout the years do not understand that middle and high school performance is directly related to the level of success they will see in the future. This problem has led me to develop a vision for a school that I can foresee myself leading.

At my school, students will see the purpose for coming to school and will find a drive or interest within themselves. Students will become actively involved in their education by concentrating on their future aspirations. Students will be attending a school that goes beyond offering the classes they need for college – it sets up a time in every students schedule to educate on the process of going to college, picking a major, getting a job or beginning a career and it partners all students with a mentor in the community to help them see what the future can hold. At this school, teachers and counselors will work closely with students, college admissions officer and mentors from the community to educate students on the purpose of school in relation to a successful meaningful future after twelfth grade.

To develop this vision, I drew from the following theories presented by Green (2009). The Human Relation Theory, Hersey and Blanchard's Theory of Situational Leadership and the Path-Goal Theory.

The Human Relation Theory (Green, 2009) takes into account the needs of the student. In the case of my vision, I feel that the targeted students need to begin to understand the relation of

their education, to what their future will hold. It also states that the followers of this leadership

theory are mentored and are committed to future goals. My purpose in creating this vision is to

help students to commit themselves to their education so they can set and reach goals for

themselves. Additionally, the Human Relation Theory incorporates the idea that all individuals

are working towards a goal, even though they will not all have the same goals. In my case, each

student will set a goal for their future after high school. For some that may mean a four year

university. For others it may mean technical training or entering the workforce without any

formal training programs. The goal is for each student to see that their current education is

imperative in creating a future for themselves.

Next, I found myself drawn to the ideas presented by Hersey and Blanchard's Theory of

Situational Leadership (Green, 2009). Of the four styles listed under this theory, I found that

what will best fit with my vision is a coaching style of leadership. I feel that my students need to

be coached not only by a school principal or leader, but by their teachers, counselors,

administrators, mentors, and family members. I feel that many students in urban districts are

unclear on what they need to do in middle and high school to prepare themselves for life as an

adult. A coaching style would best fit my vision because I will not only instruct students on what

they need to do to get into college or to get a meaningful job, I can support their progress though

carefully organized programs.

In addition to the two above mentioned theories, I also found the Path-Goal Theory

(Green, 2009) to be helpful in the creation of my vision. In this theory, the leader clarifies the

course that needs to be traveled to reach goals. This is exactly the vision I see for my students.

They need to have a clear understanding of what they need to do to get the right grades, take the

right courses, take the right placement tests, join to right activities and do whatever else is

necessary to get to where they want to go. I will make this information common knowledge for my students and set a standard that shows that I believe every student can get to where they want to be in life, if they take the right steps. What many students are missing is this clear direction. The achievement-oriented leadership role of the Path-Goal Theory states that having confidence in your followers will help them to meet challenging standards (Green, 2009).

I believe that my vision promotes the success of all students because it gives each student the opportunity to become conscious of what they feel best suits their future goals. They will be able to see a clear path to their goal and are provided with assistance inside and outside of the school to successfully follow their path.

<div align="center">**Communicating the Vision**</div>

In order for my vision to be carried out to its potential I will need to demonstrate the leadership skills of collaboration, planning and communication. I will need the support of many people inside and outside of the school. My first step would be to share my vision with the school staff and to ask them for suggestions to get the vision started. I will also ask staff members for any connections they have to the outside community in order to begin securing mentors. I would even ask some of the staff to serve as mentors themselves to students who are interested in the field of education. Beyond finding mentors, I will have to make time to plan counseling sessions and workshops where students can explore their interests and figure out their strengths. I also have to plan a schedule that allows for these types of activities to fit into a student schedule. Furthermore, I will have to communicate with the families of my students so they will understand that their children will not only be taking the necessary courses at school, but they will be involved in a multi-year planning and mentoring process.

While communicating my vision, I plan to use different types of data to help me gain the support I need from others. I will get and share information from local colleges and universities, as well as local employers that states the skills and knowledge beginning students and employees are lacking when they enter college or the workforce. I would also plan to give entering students an assessment to see how much they know about the choices they need to make during and after high school in terms of attending college or how to get the job they want. Thirdly, I would share the results of a career and/or interest survey to show all stakeholders what the students are interested in pursuing after high school.

To communicate this data efficiently and in a manner that is visible to students, families and all members of the community, I plan to use a website, open houses, and newsletter mailings. The website is necessary because it is something that can be seen by all members of the community. Here, those who can offer some type of mentoring to the students can see the process for becoming a mentor. On the website, the school can make known that we are looking for mentors. It can also present to students the requirements of the school and how the school will work with them to prepare them for college or the work force. Open houses will be planned for those who are interested in attending the school and those who are interested in mentoring. Parents and students can get their questions answered at the open houses. I can also foresee the open houses becoming a place where mentors and students can begin to make connections. As the school grows, upper classmen can help run the open houses be setting up areas of interest. The newsletter is something that can be used in addition to the website and open houses so that those who are not able to get onto the website or attend open houses can still get the information, thus hoping to get everyone in the community interested in the things happening in the school. As progression occurs, I will include student and mentor success stories in the newsletter.

**Process for Implementation of the Vision**

 To get support to begin implementation, I will first ask for the help of the school staff. Without their help, my vision will be impossible to attain. First and foremost, teachers will have to step out of normal subject areas and volunteer to help the counselors with developing and teaching class sessions on preparing for college or work. Second, I will ask the staff members to make contact with anyone they know in the community to support our vision of getting students ready for life after high school. Third, I will send out information to the business and community members asking for their help in setting up a functional mentoring program and I will send out information to local colleges and universities asking them to send information to volunteers to hold information sessions at the school.

 Once I have gathered the support from the above mentioned stakeholders, I will have strategies in place to begin implementation. The first strategy is delegation of work throughout the school. The teachers and counselors will work to create teams for specific areas of interest. For example, there will need to be a team in charge of education and careers in the medical field, or a team in charge of attending college with an undecided major, or a team in charge of gaining an entry level position with a high school diploma. As time passes and the vision develops the areas may have to break down into smaller subgroups so that the interests of all students are met. Once this has been established, my second strategy is for the steps that need to be completed in each grade level to be planned out. For example, in the ninth grade students will begin with taking career and interest surveys. They will then spend time that year researching the careers that match their interests and then finding out the type of education and training one needs in that field. In the tenth grade they will move on to researching the types of schools that they can attend to match their career interests and they will spend time figuring out what criteria they need to

meet to get into the colleges they have found for themselves. They will also have support in making sure they are meeting the criteria. The other strategy I will need to employ is making sure I have secured enough mentors so that all of the students are able to have a connection outside of the school. At first, mentors may have to volunteer to take a small group of students, but my hope as the vision develops and becomes known, that there will be enough mentors for each to take only one or two students under their wings.

### Monitoring, Assessing and Revising the Vision

With this vision will come a lot of work to make sure that all students are benefiting from the programs that will be put in place. To monitor my vision, my first step will be to schedule quarterly meetings with the counselors to reflect on the work that is being done and to discuss what the next steps will be. The counselors will take back to the teachers who are working with them what we talk about and plan during these meetings. Next, I will ask for the mentors to submit reviews on the students. These reviews will be shared with the students so they are able to hear feedback from adults who are not their teachers. Ultimately, at the end of each year I will put in place a checkup that shows the student growth from what they knew at the beginning of the year. I think that charting this information for the students will communicate to them that they are working for something.

To measure the success of my vision, I will ask the students to do a written critique of the program, specifically asking them to address how they feel it helps them to stay focused in their classes. I would give teacher surveys where student work ethic and attitudes are evaluated to see if the student is meeting the goals of the vision. For those students who are struggling, I will hold meetings that involve the student, the counselor, the parents, and if needed, the mentor. I will use

this meeting to get feedback from the students, try to get them back on track and to hear what they are struggling with in order to make program modifications, if necessary.

Other, more easily available ways I may use to monitor and assess the vision are through report card grades, percentage of student retention, graduation rates, the percentages of students entering post-secondary programs related to what they researched and were mentored in.

### Community Involvement in Vision

At this point, it is evident that the outside community will play an enormous role in the success of my school vision. First and foremost, before implementation, I will share my vision with my staff. The staff will certainly be in the community talking and it is imperative to have them onboard with the vision and to have them help develop the details. If they like and share in the same vision, the message they will send to the community will be a positive one. In the initial implementation of the mentoring program there are two things I would do. First, I will survey the students to see what areas I am going to need the largest amount of mentors in. I will then ask for mentors to come in to share aspects of what they know and believe to be successful mentoring programs so that I will be sure to use strategies that are proven successful.

To sustain the success of my vision I will need to use continual two-way communication. To make sure I am meeting the needs of all stake holders I will set up a task force made up of myself, a teacher, a student, a parent, and a community member. This team will serve as a check point to address the continued success of the vision and since it will have a representative from all stakeholder areas I will be sure to have the consideration of all viewpoints. Another way to be sure that everyone is communicating is to hold social hours. These events will be held many times throughout the year and students will be held accountable for attending at least one. At the social hour, the students, their families, the mentors and all community members will be invited

for light refreshments and to discuss the things that are going on. Finally, I would ask mentors to take part in a yearly awards ceremony where they recognize successful students. At this ceremony, award winners will be asked to share their experiences in the program. I will hold a version of this ceremony during the day so all students can see and hear what it takes to be successful in the program, and I would hold another ceremony at night so parents, mentors and the community can attend.

It is my hope that with this vision, students who are usually unsure about what it is they need to do to move on to a higher level of education or to make the move into the workforce, will be clearly led to understand these things and prepared to do them as well.

References

Green, R. J. (2009) *Practicing the art of leadership: A problem-bases approach to implementing the ISLLC standards* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.