

## DEVELOPING A VISION AND AMBITIONS

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### # Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS

- How to develop and maintain a shared vision and ambitions?

### The importance of a shared vision and ambitions

A shared vision and ambitions are at the heart of developing schools as learning organisations because they provide meaning to everyday actions and steer the other components of a learning organisation (see figure), for instance collective learning and collaboration.

A shared and strong vision is future-oriented and inspires and motivates teachers. A strong vision is more than a catchy phrase or slogan: it gives meaning, purpose, and directions with a focus on deep-rooted convictions within your school about teaching and learning. It energizes teachers to get the best of themselves and give optimal attention to students' learning needs. In a shared vision the school's moral purpose and values are resonated. If the vision converges with the beliefs, purposes, and values of the teachers, it is a strong driver that contributes to the students' learning. Teachers feel supported in acting on their beliefs and being valued as professionals.

### How to develop and maintain a shared vision and ambitions?

All team members need to be involved in the process of constructing the vision. It shows the intended quality of the school and the desired future you want to realize as a team for your students. New team members should be allowed time to get acquainted with the school's

vision and should have the opportunity to share their wisdom in forming the vision. A strong vision makes clear which educational goals the team wants to work towards. However, a vision and school goals are never static. They must be adjusted over time based on dialogues among teachers, parents, students, or educational partners.

### A shared vision guides all actions

Every day, schools are confronted with lots of demands. A shared vision helps you decide which challenges you will accept and which you will pass, and why. If you know what you stand for, it is easier to say no. By saying no, you provide the space to act on what is important for your students. When activities are not contributing to the vision, you had better not undertake that activity. A vision helps the team in setting clear educational goals and collective ambitions. A vision is the foundation of the school as a learning organization and helps the school leader align the development of its components.



## The role of the school leader in developing and maintaining a shared vision

School leaders have a pivotal role in vision development, communication, sharing and keeping the vision alive. They should be aware of their own beliefs on education, collaboration, leadership, etc. and connect it with the beliefs of their team members to create a collective vision.

School leaders can create collective team sessions investigating how to best meet the students' needs related to that vision. They can provide time and other forms of support teachers need to work towards a shared vision, relate the vision to their daily classroom practice and have dialogues about their experiences, troubles, and responsibilities.

### Activity 1

As a school leader be explicit about your own vision on learning, teaching, and leadership. Be clear that this is just one vision, and that it's important to develop the vision of the school collectively.

Constructive dialogues on goals, ambitions, and values will contribute to getting a deeper understanding of your own and each other's beliefs and the school's vision and act on them. Sometimes this might become messy, since not everyone will value the same. The school leader must provide a safe place, make sure that everyone's voice is heard and look for common ground. Is everyone on board with the vision? You might have to say goodbye to teachers who can't commit to the shared vision.



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### Activity 2

You can build the vision by encouraging teachers, students and parents having all kinds of conversations about the quality of education. What do we believe is important for our students and how can we stay close to the collective values? What kind of student outcomes do we desire? You can ask questions like:

- *When do you feel that our school is the best place to be, for students, parents, and teachers? What happened? What should happen more often? What do teachers need to do to make parents and themselves (or your students/children) feel that way?*
- *What would you preserve because it is the heart of your teaching and learning?*
- *If we look at our school in five years, what would we like to see?*

When all answers and wishes are known, you need to think about the next steps of arranging, tuning, and deciding. In the end, the vision needs to be defined and the school leader has a leading role in that.

### Activity 3

Ask teachers and students to take pictures for a week of situations that make them happy, frustrated or in any way emotional. After a week, provide time to have dialogues in small groups, sharing the pictures. Let them explain why they are happy, frustrated, or emotional. Can they come up with shared values to contribute to the formulation of the school vision and ambition?

### Activity 4

Since a shared vision is future-oriented, parents, students and teachers need to experience commitment. Therefore, they should also participate in monitoring, evaluating, and adjusting the vision. The school leader needs to mention the collective values frequently, for instance, by giving examples of teaching behaviour representing these values.

