



 FROM THE MAGAZINE

Connect With Your Mission

As we turn toward the end of the year, now is a better time than ever to reconnect with your mission.

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 4 min read





We're moving toward the final stretch of the school year, and can finally place the beginning-of-year jitters behind us. We've created lesson plans, we've managed our way through the ever-present standards, and we've guided our students toward understanding and growth. But we've also done so much more than the old cycle of plan, teach, and assess.

Within those tasks alone is a host of other to-do's, beliefs, and objectives that round out our classroom practice. Things get hectic, at best, and in the commotion and bustle of a typical school year we often lose something. Our connection to intention slowly fades as sheer grit and determination start to power us. But, when grit alone carries us, we are lesser teachers (at least I am). For that reason, building out a mission and vision can be our saving grace as the school year beats on. When sirens of standards, administration, and testing call us ashore, our mission — like a lighthouse — reminds us to stay safely on course.



What is a mission statement?

A mission statement, as you'll find on most company websites, is simply a short description of what you do and why you do it. "A mission statement may describe a school's day-to-day operational objectives, its instructional values, or its public commitments to its students and community," according to the Glossary of Education Reform. Skeptics among us might think of missions as frivolous and silly corporate sentiments. But, cast your doubt aside for a moment, and you'll see that they are far more valuable than you might imagine. A concise statement detailing what you will do in your classroom teaching practice and why you will do it ... it's like a mantra; a note from your former self.

What is a vision statement?



like? The vision speaks to your aspirations for the teaching practice, student outcomes, and student experience. The Glossary of Education Reform states “Generally speaking, a vision statement expresses a hoped-for future reality, while a mission statement declares the practical commitments and actions that a school believes are needed to achieve its vision.” Think idealistically, think long-term, and envision a reality where you’re fully living your mission.

Why should you have a teacher mission statement?

Mission statements are meant to be the consistent framework for the work you do. Clearly establishing your intentions for the year and the motivation for the work builds a steady foundation for the year; heck, for the career. A mission statement should not get tucked away into a drawer. In fact, that’s the worst thing you could do. It’s meant to be lived, reviewed regularly, and leveraged as a tool to help focus your practice throughout the year. Having a rough week? Falling off course? Feeling burned-out? Take a look at that mission and have a moment of honest reflection.



“Teachers as leaders in their classroom need continued motivation and rejuvenation to meet the demands of the profession,” says Jessica Balsley, founder and president of The Art of Education University, which helps art teachers access higher quality professional development. “A professional mission can ground you, motivate you, and help you remember why you entered the profession.”

Keep your mission and vision statements visible. Consult them when planning, grading, and teaching — on good days, and especially on challenging days. The more you actively hold up your work against your mission and vision, the more authentic and successful your work will be.



short and memorable. Don't be afraid to inject a little Don Draper into your mission. Make it memorable and catchy, for your own sake. They shouldn't include every single detail of your classroom practice, but should tie a bow around your big-picture work.

The XQ Institute, an organization that works with educators across the country to relaunch and start new and innovative high schools, suggests keeping it straightforward. "A simple formula for a mission statement is: We aim for x by doing y." An example? *I aim to create a collaborative school community by including students, staff, and families in classroom governance and culture.*

Be open to change.

Hey, we are all evolving — growing and learning just as much as our students. Mission and vision statements can change over time. That's totally okay. Don't feel like you've failed because needs or situations have changed your practice. The point of the exercise is to outline your values, your approaches, and your goals. Some things may shift over time. Think of your mission and vision statements as living documents that evolve along with you.



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