

Envision: Exploring Our Vision, Values, and Aspirations

Facilitator Guidance Document

Why It's Important

- Schools and districts are best positioned for Continuous Improvement when they have a shared set of values and principles that guide both their long-term vision and day-to-day operations.
- Schools are complex systems that constantly undergo change. Having a set of shared values, aspirations, and principles can provide a foundation for the future. These values and aspirations can serve as a basis to align actions, energy, and resources in service of what the school is working toward. This can serve as a constant in an everchanging world.
- While school team members may have had previous experience writing “Vision Statements,” teams should be prepared to go beyond selecting words that might serve this function and explore what they consider to be the important values and principles that will anchor the work ahead. In order to think about the future, team members will need to spend time considering what they see as the school’s purpose, values, and the principles for which the school stands.

How the Envision Activity Fits into the SCEP Development Process

- This Envision Activity should occur at the start of the **Five-Part SCEP Needs Assessment Process for Newly Identified Schools**. The activity is **optional for schools that are re-identified**. Schools that have been re-identified and have either new leadership or a significant number of new team members may find it useful to complete the activity again. Schools that are re-identified may also find it useful to return to the findings from the previous year’s Envision activity to reflect on progress over the past year.
- Identifying a common set of values and aspirations provides an opportunity for the team to begin working together and understanding the perspectives of different team members. Having a common set of values and aspirations can also ground future discussions and align future activities around a shared understanding of the possibilities ahead for the school. Re-identified schools are welcome to revisit this activity annually at the start of the planning process, especially if they have many new team members.

SCEP Needs Assessment and Plan Development Activities	Envision: Exploring the Vision, Values and Aspirations for the school	Analyze: Internal and External Data	Analyze: Survey Data	Listen: Interviewing Students	Envision: Reflect, Synthesize, and Plan	Writing the Plan
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Facilitator Guidance

Customization and Adaptability

The manner in which a school team explores its vision, values, and aspirations may look different from school to school. It is important that the school team’s exploration of its vision, values and aspirations is done in a manner that makes sense for the school community and that the process the school pursues has meaning for the school. Please feel free to incorporate your own process or customize or adapt the [Sample Facilitated Envisioning Activity](#) below.

In advance of any facilitated discussion, the facilitator may find it helpful to explore the range of resources available regarding visioning. The *School Reform Initiative* “[Back to the Future](#)” protocol offers an example of an alternate way to explore a school’s vision and may be a helpful resource to consider, especially when customizing a facilitated activity. NYSED has prepared a [Sample Facilitated Envisioning Activity](#) below. Please feel free to use it as is, customize or adapt the sample provided, or incorporate your own process to meet the needs of your school.

Sample Facilitated Activity Planning Notes

Schools incorporating the Sample Envisioning Facilitated Activity should have at least 12 total pieces of chart paper available (four pieces of chart paper for each of three small groups). Three different-colored markers will also be needed. The activity can be easily adapted for a virtual meeting; the facilitator will need to be familiar with the activity in advance to make the necessary adaptations. For those conducting the meeting virtually, the facilitator should plan on using a platform such as Jamboard as a means for small groups to collect their thoughts.

While the activity provides opportunities for team members to contribute, the facilitator should emphasize the importance of the group discussions that will emerge through these activities. The small group activities outlined below are designed to *elicit the best group responses while building team cohesion*. For example, the prompts elicit a specific number of items (to be recorded on a specific number of pieces of chart paper), rather than leaving it undefined where groups may more readily become side-tracked or lose focus.

Through team discussion and consensus, rather than brainstorming where all responses are considered of equal value, each small group weighs each contribution for inclusion, and/or revision. Each team should decide to prioritize some items over others so that the best of each group's efforts is recorded.

This may be a new experience for some participants as they work together in their small groups. Therefore, the facilitator will need to be proactive in setting the stage for these meaningful interactions.

Considerations to Promote Equity and Inclusion

As the team explores its vision, values, and aspirations, it is important that the conversations take into consideration all students served by the school, and, when applicable, acknowledge that there may be barriers that need to be addressed to promote a vision of inclusivity and belonging.

In addition to making sure that all students are considered as part of the Envision activity the team completes, the following reflective questions are offered as suggestions for teams to consider as they explore their vision, values, and aspirations:

- What role do diversity, equity, and inclusion play in the vision of our school? Where in our aspirations and future planning does equity fit in?
- How might we incorporate diversity, equity and inclusion as important parts of who we are and who we want to become as a school?
- What might it look like for all members of our school community to feel valued?

Teams may also find the Department's resources on [Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Practices](#) and the Board of Regents' [Framework on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in New York's Schools: A Call to Action](#) useful in exploring this topic further.

Sample Facilitated Envisioning Activity (Approximately 90 minutes total)

Step 1: Explore the Current Reality of the School (Approximately 25 minutes)

This activity engages participants in developing an accurate description of the school as it now exists.

1. Inform the team that they will be breaking up into three small groups of equal number to focus on one of the three levers of continuous improvement:
 - [Organizing Adults](#)
 - [Centering Students](#)
 - [Linking Teaching and Learning](#)

To the extent that it is practically possible permit members to make their selection based on individual interest or where they feel the most invested.

2. In three distinct areas of the room post chart paper for groups to record their thoughts. One area designated for Organizing Adults, another for Centering Students, and the third for Linking Teaching and Learning. Two or three blank pieces of chart paper should be posted for each of these categories.
3. As you direct everyone in the room to walk to the designated area of their choice, ask them to designate group members for the following roles:
 - Facilitator
 - Recorder
 - Timekeeper
 - Equity and Inclusion advocate (while all members of the group should be taking into consideration the needs of all students, the person in this specific role will have the responsibility of encouraging the group to consider how what is being discussed fits into consideration all groups of students).
4. Distribute the one-page prompts to each of the three groups.
5. Once roles have been assigned, guide the group to respond to the prompts for discussion. The discussion should allow the various voices and perspectives of the group to be heard on the topic(s). The facilitator should also be a part of the discussion. Some of the responses require a specific number of items to be listed on the chart paper, therefore the groups may need to discuss the importance or typicality of each item under discussion. Try to keep responses to just two pieces of chart paper at the most.

Step 2: Video (10 minutes)

This activity provides space for the team to transition from the details of current realities, to provide some tangible examples of notable schools, and to prepare to begin the process of envisioning the school they aspire to become.

1. Share with the group that the following video is not intended to be prescriptive, but an example of an existing school that may provide inspiration for the third step in our process.
2. Call the group's attention to the front of the room where a short video will be displayed.
3. Queue the video "[School of the Future Tour](#)" Prior to starting the video, ask the team to listen for examples of common beliefs and principles that exist throughout the school.
4. After watching the video, ask the whole group, "What are some of the common beliefs, principles, and values at the school that influence teaching and learning and how the school is organized?"

Facilitator note: Depending on what is shared, the facilitator may need to ask a follow-up question that brings the observation to a "value." For example, if a group member shares that the school has small class sizes, the facilitator may ask "What value or principle is behind that decision to prioritize small class sizes?" with potential answers being "Valuing regular contact with parents," "Valuing getting to know the students on an individual level," etc.

Step 3: Envision a New Reality for the School (25 minutes)

This activity engages the team in articulating their vision, values, and aspirations.

1. Inform the whole group that we are going to explore our shared vision, values, and aspirations within our small groups.
2. Have the participants return to their small groups where they will respond to the discussion prompts for this section. The discussion should allow the various voices and perspectives of the group to be heard on the topic(s). The facilitator should also be a part of the discussion and help the group narrow the ideas shared into a maximum of four that will be recorded on chart paper.

Step 4: Gallery Walk and Whole Group Contribution (25 minutes)

This activity ensures all team members have had opportunities to provide input on all three categories of school improvement.

1. Distribute a different colored marker to the recorder from each group.
2. Guide the groups to do a Gallery Walk where each group will walk by the charts of the other groups. They will do this twice.
3. The first Gallery Walk is designed to allow the opportunity to become familiar with the perspectives of each group and how they proceeded from Current Reality to envisioning a New Reality (5 minutes).
4. The second Gallery Walk is a timed rotation where all groups get up and rotate once clockwise, spending 8 minutes at the first station, then rotate again to spend another 8 minutes at the second station.
 - While at their stations for the second Gallery Walk, each small group will consider the same envisioning prompts used to generate the chart they are observing (i.e., *"If we begin to imagine our school with the _____ we aspire to, what would that look like?"*).
 - Each small group will identify up to four of their own envisioning ideas to add to the chart paper. The recorder from each group will add these ideas using their group's colored marker.
 - If one of the ideas already written on the chart paper resonates with the small group, the recorder can put a large star next to the idea using the group's colored marker. This can happen up to four times – the total number of stars plus the total number of ideas added should not exceed four per small group.

Step 5: Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. Bring everyone back to one large group. Share that you will be taking photographs of the chart responses to memorialize the ideas generated around envisioning a New Reality for the school.
2. Inform the team that you will be sharing the images with them in preparation for the next continuous improvement planning meeting and to return back to in future conversations.
3. While some of the vision, values, and aspirations shared may be too ambitious to achieve in the immediate future, these ideas do provide a foundation for us to consider and ultimately work toward as we begin to explore the school through the next several activities.

Sample Envisioning Facilitated Activity Prompts – Step 1

Step 1: Explore the Current Reality of the School

Small Group: Organizing Adults

1. What are the one or two best examples of professional collaboration and teamwork within the school?
2. What are one or two examples where professional collaboration and teamwork could use some strengthening?
3. What are the one or two best examples of how school leaders or teachers communicate with families and/or the school community?
4. When it comes to how adults work together toward common goals, what are some barriers within our control that make working together challenging?

Small Group: Centering Students

1. What are the two or three most consistent factors in the school that promote a positive environment and make this a place students want to be?
2. What are one or two examples of where our work toward ensuring a positive environment could use some strengthening?
3. What are the one or two best examples of our school as a student-centered school?
4. In consideration of the link between [school connectedness](#) and student success, what are some barriers within our control that make it challenging to ensure that the students feel connected to our school?

Small Group: Linking Teaching and Learning

1. What are the top three most positive instructional practices teachers have embraced schoolwide?
2. What are two or three less effective practices that seem to be pervasive schoolwide?
3. What are the one or two best examples of our school as a place where learning occurs?
4. When it comes to student learning, what are some barriers within our control that make working together challenging?

Sample Envisioning Facilitated Activity Prompts – Step 3

Step 3: Envision a New Reality for the School (done after watching the video)

Small Group: Organizing Adults

If we begin to imagine our school with the adult collaboration we aspire to, what would that look like? List no more than four ideas that the group can really get behind.

Small Group: Centering Students

If we begin to imagine our school as a student-centered, positive environment where all students feel connected to the school, what would that look like? List no more than four ideas that the group can really get behind.

Small Group: Linking Teaching and Learning

If we begin to imagine our school with the quality of teaching and/or learning we aspire to, what would that look like? List no more than four ideas that the group can really get behind.