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Licensed Educator Perceptions of the Use of Mission, Vision, and Values to Guide Daily School Operations: A Qualitative Study

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Licensed Educator Perceptions of the Use of Mission, Vision, and Values to Guide Daily School

Operations: A Qualitative Study

by

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"LICENSED EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES TO GUIDE DAILY SCHOOL OPERATIONS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY," a Doctoral research project prepared by ADALINE FRASER in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership.

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ABSTRACT

This study used a qualitative analysis approach to examine the perceptions of four licensed staff members—three teachers and one counselor—on the use of mission, vision, and values (MVV) to guide daily school operations. There is little empirical research and theory on the use of MVV in schools, and what literature does exist focuses mainly on the administrative level of education management. Thus, this study aimed to explore this topic at a non-administrative level, while still using a licensed layer of a school hierarchy. A focus group with three teachers and an individual interview with a school counselor were used to gather data on how these staff members perceived MVV being used in their school.

The interviews uncovered the presence of six unique MVV statements. There were two distinct perceptions of the use of MVV within the school: (1) teachers perceived a lack of intentional and cohesive use within the school, and (2) the counselor felt school policies and practices aligned with the school's MVV. Further, elements of all six statements were identified within school policies and practices. This distinction may be a result of participants' differing roles within the school. Participants also explored what might happen if MVV was intentionally used to guide daily school operations. Regardless of participants' perception of the use of MVV, all participants were quick to defend school administrators as school leaders who were doing the best they could with the resources available to them.

This study also serves as a snapshot in time. Data were gathered during the spring of the first full school year of comprehensive distance learning sparked by COVID-19 school closures. Data did not show significant differences between the application of MVV whether learning was in-building or remote. At all times, participants who described areas for growth in using MVV

had students at the center of their thinking. The study's findings suggest that the intentional

implementation of MVV could improve school culture and student learning.

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DEDICATION

For my family, friends, and teachers,

who were alternately cheerleaders and taskmasters,

and who saw me through this process with love and kindness.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Imagine you were the Chief Executive Officer of a company whose performance was below industry standard, had low workplace morale and whose improvement efforts, through increased scrutiny of processes and outcomes, produced stagnant returns despite previous management efforts to improve. This is what is happening in the United States public education system.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that in 1967, the "US ranked 11 out of 12 nations" (Programme for International Student Achievement, 2019, para 1) in math. By 2019, the test data included 79 countries, and the US ranked 36th (Programme for International Student Achievement, 2019, para. 6). Reading scores for U.S. fourth- and eighth-grade students was slightly better—13th out of 79 countries, placing the U.S. in the average category (PISA, 2019, para. 6). U.S. academic performance has been stable between 1967 and 2019 for math and 2000 and 2019 for reading (Programme for International Student Achievement, 2019). Further, the PISA data also shows that what has not remained stable is the achievement gap (Programme for International Student Achievement, 2019). In fact, it has been widening over the years. What is even more notable is that this stability in scores and widening of the achievement gap occurred in spite of nearly two decades of federal-level accountability measures to improve student performance.

The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, designed to hold schools accountable for student achievement on standardized tests, brought K12 public schools under increasing scrutiny. The goal of NCLB was to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap. This focus changed the nature of school leadership, adding new required skills

for administrators, asking them to straddle the line between facilities and personnel management, and instructional excellence and strong community relationships (Singh & Al-Fadlhi, 2011). This is further complicated by the need for schools to innovate in order to prepare students for post-secondary life in the 21st century.

There is enormous pressure for schools to prepare students for standardized tests, often at the expense of other skills necessary for post-secondary success (Robinson, 2011). This shift in operational focus—away from behavioral and mindset skills toward test success, has fundamentally changed how schools are managed and operated on a day-to-day basis. Schoen and Fusarelli (2008) found misalignment between the competing needs of leading for NCLB success and leading a 21st-century school. Furthermore, the consequences for school principals if their school fails to meet NCLB improvement standards has increased job stress, which leads to higher rates of turnover (Mitani, 2018). Higher accountability measures have created no significant improvement in student achievement, increased the achievement gap, and created a higher-stress work environment. In other words, these measures seem to have made the situation worse.

It is tempting to blame student failure to achieve on a multitude of factors outside a school's control such as students' socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, or disability. There is even a tendency to blame teachers for the failure of traditionally underserved populations. While these can be factors that impact a student's ability to achieve in a school setting, it may also be an act of blame-shifting rather than the true cause of certain student groups' non-performance to established academic standards. There are schools that serve traditionally underserved populations which are successful at both high student achievement on mandatory standardized tests, as well as higher graduation and college enrollment rates (Education Policy Improvement

Center, 2009; Hays, 2013; Van Der Westhuizen et al., 2005). This suggests there is a way to promote student achievement, even in an era of high accountability on standardized tests.

One solution may be to take an organization development approach to school leadership. This approach has been successfully used in for-profit and non-profit settings (Collins, 2005; Lencioni, 2002; Rosen, 2013). Though Collins (2005) objects to the idea that for-profit organization development is an acceptable method for school systems, it may be a matter of semantics. The successful implementation of organization development principles—common understanding of an organization's mission, vision, and values (MVV), staff buy-in to the MVV, using the MVV to create consistent and reliable structures for decision-making, creating a continual feedback loop so ineffective practices can be altered—these can lead to a self-sustaining system for improvement (Schmuck et al., 2012). The key to successfully using this process is establishing a common direction and gaining buy-in and commitment from staff (Schmuck et al., 2012). To do so, it not only requires leaders to use MVV in making decisions, but demands teachers perceive the use of these principles in daily operations.

Problem Statement

Many educators struggle to create cohesive school cultures at the same time their daily focus is fragmented across a wide variety of issues—instruction, student discipline, hiring practices, teacher job satisfaction, staff development, student experience, and school culture. Each of these areas, and more, are often met with in-the-moment responses that lack an overall framework to provide consistency. Organization development literature stresses the importance of staff coming together around a common, and commonly understood, MVV, so everyone is pulling in the same direction (Schmuck et al., 2012). With this common understanding, burdens can be reduced at all levels because the range of acceptable behaviors and responses is clearly

articulated. Thus, there are fewer choices to make and a guiding framework for addressing issues as they arise.

Though this study does not specifically address the issue of school management during crisis, the 2020 Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic created new challenges many school districts were ill-prepared to address. At the administrative level, this included such things as supporting teachers during the transition to distance learning, student engagement, student supplies like computers and internet service, services normally provided by the school like meals and mental health services and meeting the needs of special populations like English Language Learners and Special Education students. Organization development literature suggests an operationalized mission statement eases crisis decision-making and helps staff navigate sudden upheavals. One way it does this is by providing everyone within the organization with a clear set of expectations and a framework that acts as a funnel for decision-making (Jackson, 2002; Rosen, 2013; Schmuck et al., 2012). Moreover, operationalization of MVV statements allows for a distribution of leadership, easing the burden on a single leader or leadership team, and empowering teachers and other school staff to make decisions aligned with the school's MVV. This sense of cohesion creates a school culture for student learning regardless of circumstances.

Given the significance of the impact using MVV statements can have, it is important to understand if these statements are being used, and if so, what is the perception of their use. While the literature indicates that a school leader's operationalization of MVV statements to guide daily practices can have enormous positive impact on school culture and student learning, it is not known if teachers perceive the use, if any, of MVV statements to guide day-to-day operation.

This study builds on the work of Watkins and McCaw (2008) and Gurley et al. (2014), who examined the knowledge of school administrators regarding their schools' MVV statements,

and its impact on their leadership. Moving to the next layer in the school hierarchy—licensed non-administrative staff—will demonstrate the impact the use or non-use of school MVV may have on their own practices. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of licensed educators on the use of the school's MVV statements in daily operations.

Conceptual Framework

This study examined the perception of teachers regarding the use of MVV in guiding daily school operations. The study builds on the work of Gurley et al. (2014) and Watkins and McCaw (2008), who examined the knowledge of MVV among students in a graduate leadership program. Gurley et al. (2014) and Watkins and McCaw (2008) sought to establish the level of knowledge students in an administrative program had about their school's mission statements. Without a knowledge of their school's mission statements, leaders would be unable to use the statements as a guiding force for leading their schools. Moreover, this lack of knowledge was reflected in a school's level of effectiveness (Gurley et al., 2014; Tichner-Wagner et al., 2016; Van Der Westhuizen et al., 2005).

The conceptual framework for this study is a goal-free approach, where the criteria for evaluation are developed from an assessment of collected data (Spaulding, 2014). Moreover, by having no pre-determined goals, bias toward a particular conclusion is eliminated (Spaulding, 2014). This study collected data from non-administrative licensed staff. Therefore, using a goal-free approach to data collection provided an opportunity to collect data that could be analyzed to examine how teachers perceive of the use of MVV in their school's operation.

Context

Modern accountability measures for public K12 schools in the United States were introduced by the NCLB Act of 2001 and reframed in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Under NCLB, schools were required to test all students in grades three through eight and once in high school, and provide the results of those tests (Klein, 2015). Schools that failed to meet targets in two or more consecutive years risked progressively worse consequences, including state intervention, and having to allow students to transfer schools (Klein, 2015), which could reduce the school's funding as enrollment drops. ESSA also includes accountability measures and consequences which vary somewhat from NCLB. For instance, a low-performing school would not be subject to state intervention or allowing school choice for the neediest students until it misses targets for four years (Klein, 2016). However, the changes in leadership practices to meet the requirements of NCLB (Singh & Al-Fahli, 2011) would have become deeply ingrained in school practices and pre-service administration programs by the time ESSA was enacted.

External accountability measures can inhibit school improvement efforts if they lead to a focus on content at the expense of other skills necessary for post-secondary success (Robinson, 2011; Tichner-Wagner et al., 2016) and further drive a school away from cohesion around focused goals. The imposition of external accountability measures suggests schools have not been able to systematize effective practices for improving student outcomes. Each day, educators face a wide variety of choices, and the decisions made will have both immediate and long-term impact on student outcomes. Operationalizing MVV statements can lead to consistency and reliability within the organization, empowered teachers, and improved student learning (Bredeson, 2013; Calder, 2018; Carpenter, 2015; Landeau et al., 2009; Odden & Wohlstetter,

1995). With an ever-increasing drive to measure schools' success in improving student outcomes, there is a need to develop systems and practices that provide educators with a framework for decision-making and support the goal of increasing student achievement.

Research Question

This study addressed the issue of internal school management through the use of MVV. Many schools operate in a haphazard way where problems are addressed in the moment and without a guiding framework to provide consistency and reliability within the organization. This study drew on the work of Gurley et al (2014) and Watkins and McCaw (2008) and expanded the inquiry to the non-administrative staff level. I studied the experiences of licensed staff as they related to the use of MVV as a guiding paradigm within the school. I wanted to understand how these experiences impact school culture and teacher perceptions of school practices. This research contributes to the body of knowledge regarding effective school leadership practices and further understanding of why administrators and teachers should use MVV to guide daily school operations.

RQ: How do licensed staff perceive their school's mission, vision, and values are used to guide daily school operations?

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

This study depended on voluntary participation by participants engaging in a focus group or individual interview. Furthermore, this study used a qualitative study design, which limits generalizability of the results, as the study site and participants may have characteristics that are different from those at other sites. Moreover, the data are qualitative in nature, and therefore subject to interpretation by the researcher. This means there could be bias toward the use of MVV as a guiding force in the school which could have affected interpretation and assessment of

the data. A further limitation of the study is the presence of multiple MVV statements, which could impact the results since participants referenced different statements to define their perception of the use of MVV to guide daily school operations.

Delimitations for this study include the study site—a public comprehensive high school serving grades 9-12 as the research site, which excludes schools with a different grade range, private schools, charter schools and alternative schooling settings. Additionally, participants were sought through the intermediary of a school administrator, who chose a convenience sample, which may have impacted the data collected based on their relationships with the administrator. The school's demographics were used descriptively and not as a factor in data analysis. This further reduced generalizability of results.

Background

After five years as a classroom teacher, I spent two years serving as a high school Associate Principal. I then returned to the classroom for a year. This research grew out of my experience as a K12 teacher and administrator.

In my first five years a teacher, I chafed against the cultural expectation that my work hours would be long, parents had more say in a student's grades than the student's demonstration of knowledge, and inconsistent administrative action and support was the norm. As an administrator, I was frustrated on two fronts. First, by the systems and expectations that prevented me from creating the work-place culture I had wanted as a teacher, and second, by the fragmented and inconsistent ways we applied school policy, interacted with students and parents, and supported teachers. When I returned to the classroom for a final year, the things I had experienced in my original teaching years became sharper and more delineated—the gap

between what the school claimed it wanted to accomplish and how the school was managed was starkly defined.

I believe it is important for school leaders to understand the impact of, and critically examine, their own practices and the institutional structures that affect those practices. I also believe one of the best ways to do so is to *ask the teachers*, listen deeply, and hear what they say. I also recognize the tension that exists between the ideal school day and the needs and demands of leading a school. As a school administrator, I strove for transparency. At the same time, there were processes and decisions made behind closed doors that could not be shared with others. I pursued this research because I believe there has to be a better way to accomplish what is expected to happen between the first and last bells.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Although there is not a great deal of literature from empirical research on the impact of using mission, vision, and values in guiding the day-to-day activities of an organization, there is enough to suggest it is an important, if not essential, element of school improvement efforts. In the existing literature, three themes emerge consistently. First, operationalizing MVV through a shared understanding of common purpose and how MVV are implemented are a significant factor in bringing cohesion and purpose to a school's everyday functioning and school improvement efforts. Second, the role of leadership in infusing day-to-day operations and decision-making within the school by using the MVV suggests leaders need a deep understanding of the school's MVV to guide the school. Finally, the consistent use of MVV in guiding the day-to-day actions and decision-making within a school will positively impact student achievement. Thus, it is important to understand the impact using MVV will have on a school's culture and its improvement efforts (Gurley et al., 2014).

Defining Mission, Vision, and Values

Before beginning any discussion, it is necessary to define *mission*, *vision*, and *values*. Misunderstanding and miscommunication often result from a lack of shared meaning for common words and phrases (Schmuck et al., 2012). Moreover, usage of certain words embedded in the lexicon of education leads to them becoming so common the words have lost their meaning (Tichner-Wagner et al., 2016). Furthermore, within the literature, there is disagreement on the structure and meanings of MVV statements. Accordingly, it is necessary to clearly define how MVV will be used in this research to bring consistency to their meanings when discussing their impact within schools.

Mission Statements

Developing a strong, clear mission statement is essential to creating a focused direction for leading a school or district. MacLeod (2016) notes that a mission statement should be clear and focused, and Drucker (2008) agrees, going one step further and declaring an organization's mission should "fit on a t-shirt" (p. 14). In fact, Drucker (2008) insists a mission statement should be eight-words or fewer. Cho et al. (2019) argue that narrow mission statements might not serve students effectively. However, this contradicts the idea that a focused mission statement provides groups with a clear direction (Schmuck et al., 2012). Moreover, such a clear direction can help prevent mission creep (Waite, 2010). In other words, a lack of focus within the mission statement can prevent effective movement toward desired outcomes.

What becomes clear in the literature is that current mission statements often lack clarity. In fact, most mission statements embody elements of vision and values (Gurley et al., 2014). However, MVV are three separate statements and should be treated as such (Gurley et al., 2014). Mission statements answer the question, "Why do we exist?" (Gurley et al., 2014; Watkins & McCaw, 2008). Drucker (2008) agrees, stating a "mission says why you do what you do, not the means by which you do it" (p. 14). A mission statement should contain "a verb, a target population, and an outcome that implies something to measure" (Starr, 2012). Therefore, a mission statement describes the reason an organization exists and what measurable transformation it promises. For example, the mission statement of a suburban middle school located in the Pacific Northwest is *ABC Middle School's mission is to prepare students for high school*. This statement succinctly and effectively answers the question of why it exists and what transformation it will provide.

Vision Statements

Vision statements act as the hoped-for state-of-being brought about by a school's improvement efforts. Watkins and McCaw (2008) note that vision statements set direction. Indeed, vision statements should be lofty and aspirational (Watkins & McCaw, 2008). Gurley et al. (2014) argue that vision statements are an articulation of an organization's hoped-for future. Vision statements should be "(a) imaginable, (b) desirable, (c) feasible, (d) focused, (e) flexible, and (f) communicable" (Kotter, 1996, p. 72). The idea of feasibility is important in that it keeps the vision attainable and measurable. Put another way, feasibility means an organization will know when they have achieved the desired vision. Therefore, a vision statement answers the question, "Where are we going?" and provides a metric for knowing when the organization has achieved its vision.

Values Statements

Values statements are not really statements at all and can be described in single words or short phrases. Values are the guiding principles for how a school does business at a day-to-day operational level. Values statements may include ideas such as *integrity*, *respect*, and *learning*. According to Gurley et al. (2014) values statements are the shared beliefs of an organization and determine how members must behave to live out those values. What this means is that values statements must be clear enough to translate into observable behaviors (Gurley et al., 2014). Calder (2011) echoes this sentiment, noting, "Values are intrinsic guidelines, not dependent on a particular situation, for making strategic choices that shape longer-term behavior, which determine what may be expected from that institution" (p. 17). Therefore, if mission statements answer the why, and vision statements answer the where, values statements answer the how. In short, values statements guide the daily actions and behaviors of those within the organization.

Influence of Mission, Vision, and Values

In the literature regarding the influence of MVV on school effectiveness and student

success, several themes emerge. First, implementing MVV creates a healthy school culture, and

a healthy school culture is linked to increased student success. Second, buy-in to and shared

understanding of MVV by staff, students, and parents brings all communities together working

toward a common goal, which smooths school operations (Schmuck et al., 2012). Finally,

mission statements are the lifeblood of a school's direction, and should play a role in strategic

planning (Holosko et al., 2015, p).

It is important to note that not all literature addresses MVV as a triumvirate working in

concert within a school. At the same time, the influence of each of these statements, both

separately and in tandem, point to similar conclusions. There is also some overlap between ideas.

For example, a healthy school culture implies community effort toward a common goal. This is

seen as different than effort toward a common goal from an organizational development

perspective. When there is overlap, ideas will be treated separately. Furthermore, much of the

literature focuses on school organizations that are K12 secondary, K12 district, or collegiate

level. Thus, it may not speak to issues faced by elementary or middle schools. The differing

levels are noted throughout this review.

School Culture

School culture creates the atmosphere in which schools operate, as well as the foundation

for student success. Watkins and McCaw (2008) find MVV to be a critical component of a

healthy school culture. At its most fundamental level, culture is how a school does business

(DeVaney et al., 2012) and a healthy school culture is one where there is sharing and collegiality

in continuous improvement and decision-making, a sense of empowerment through shared

meaning and involvement, and collaborative leadership that balances direction with teamwork (DeVaney, 2012, p. 36). To create a healthy school culture, staff need a shared understanding of the school's MVV. Indeed, a common understanding of shared mission creates a school atmosphere geared toward that mission (Farmer-Hinton, 2011). Furthermore, a "culture of learning" (Tichner-Wagner et al., 2016, p. 609) can be the difference between ineffective and effective high schools. In other words, a healthy school culture leads to student success.

A culture of learning rests on shared goals, high expectations, and a sense of efficacy (Tichner-Wagner, et al., 2016). When this culture is infused within the high school's daily operations, staff may share a sense of purpose that inspires them to work beyond district mandates (Tichner-Wagner, et al., 2016). Anyamele (2007) agrees, noting that MVV are an element of creating an effective organization. Moreover, in a study of four charter schools serving traditionally marginalized students within the Boston Public School system, each charter school's connection to mission and vision were found to be the basis of its level of success (Hays, 2013). Further, a shared support of vision statements allows schools to leverage stronger transformative visions (Kose, 2011).

An additional influence of MVV on school culture is that when staff is working toward a common goal, responsibility can be decentralized. This decentralization of responsibility can lead to increased staff morale (Rosen, 2013). When everyone is working toward a shared goal at the same time and in the same way, and have internalized the school's MVV, teachers are able to make decisions within their sphere of influence (Schmuck et al., 2012). Indeed, operationalized vision statements can be used to make building-wide decisions, from curriculum to hiring practices (Kose, 2011). Unifying decision-making around a school's vision provides consistency

in building operations (Kose, 2011), another element in staff commitment to an organization (Rosen, 2013).

Effective Implementation

Implementation of MVV as a guiding force for school operations is about aligning MVV with daily behaviors to increase student success. In school improvement efforts, this alignment is critical to changing behaviors directed toward a more successful future for students. While acknowledging there is some disagreement among school organizations about the purpose of K12 education, Gurley et al. (2014) believe the mission of a school should be to increase student learning. Sommers (2009) echoes this belief, noting that schools exist to promote student success. Furthermore, MVV are the foundational pillars of how a college operates (Calder, 2011). It follows, then, MVV should be used to guide day-to-day actions within a school (Watkins & McCaw, 2008). As a result, aligning daily behaviors with foundational MVV can be leveraged to increase student success.

One barrier to implementing and aligning MVV with daily operations is that many schools do not have useable MVV statements in the first place. When MVV statements are not developed for usability, staff buy-in will be difficult (Calder, 2011) and staff buy-in is a necessary element for organizational improvement (Schmuck et al., 2012). For instance, many vision statements are too lofty and seen as unachievable (Calder, 2011). Therefore, staff buy-in, necessary for successful implementation, seems pointless since the end goal appears to be out of reach.

For staff to buy into MVV, a second element for success needs to be present: shared understanding of what operationalization looks like. This shared understanding needs to guide the expectations for all aspects of a school's operation, including instruction. In a study of a new

college prep school during its first four years of operation, Farmer-Hinton (2011) found that shared understanding of a school's mission to prepare students for college could create a both/and situation where some teachers agreed with what behaviors were necessary to instill in students for college readiness, and other teachers did not. Furthermore, a shared understanding of mission without an understanding of expected behaviors, such as implementing a common rhythm to a class period and school-wide efforts toward certain skills, impacts student outcomes (Farmer-Hinton, 2011). Accordingly, with shared understanding of how MVV is to be operationalized, MVV can be used as a basis for staff evaluation (Sommers, 2009). In other words, shared understanding of both MVV and behavior expectation for its implementation is the basis for consistency in decision making and practices (Calder, 2018). Thus, when all staff have a common understanding of both the MVV and its operationalization, the school will run more smoothly and create a more consistent student experience. This consistency of experience and expectation will likely lead to increased student success.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is how schools determine where to focus future efforts toward improvement. To provide a consistent framework for improvement, strategic planning should use mission and values as part of the process (Ferrari et al., 2010). This allows a school to reality-check its initiatives against its mission and values. Strategic planning also includes where a school will focus professional development (PD) efforts as effective PD takes time and intention. Indeed, values should be used as a measure of effective resource allocation (McClenny & Dare, 2013). Kose (2011) notes that vision statements should have clearly articulated boundaries such as a focus on student learning or social justice. Further, clearly articulated visions act as a tool for assessing success in achieving prior school goals (Pekarsky, 2007).

This vision cannot be achieved, however, if MVV are not understood and implemented with fidelity. MVV and goals are a critical element in school improvement efforts (Gurley et al., 2014). For example, efforts at restructuring in a turn-around school began with the Sustainable Growth Committee developing goals, one of which was to create MVV (Landeau et al., 2009). This initial step aligns with research suggesting MVV is a critical element in school success. Unfortunately, many teachers do not know their annual goals (Schmoker, 2003) or administrative expectations. Also, many schools do not use MVV as a guiding force (Cho et al., 2019). This can make it difficult for a school to come together and focus on a common goal that will lead to school improvement and increased student success.

The Role of Leadership

Leadership within a school has long been acknowledged as a key element in the success or failure of school improvement efforts. Leadership is essential for setting school culture through the implementation of MVV (Watkins & McCaw, 2008). In addition, leadership is responsible for moving improvement efforts out of the theorizing and goal-setting phases and into action (Fullan, 2011). New behaviors and actions, often uncomfortable because they are different from the status quo, is where real change occurs (Fullan, 2011).

The type and style of leadership may have an impact on the effective implementation of MVV for school culture and student success. Calder (2006) believes leaders must sell the vision to stakeholders. This takes charismatic leadership (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Pekarsky (2007) agrees, noting that vision-guided institutions rely on a charismatic leader. Leaders that can inspire staff are necessary to develop a professional culture of leadership at levels below administrators, such as department chairs, who are responsible for developing and sharing an instructional vision with their staff (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013).

Kose (2011) suggests principals should develop vision statements, and Anyamele (2007) echoes this sentiment, positing that leadership needs to develop and model MVV at the same time they establish systems to support implementation of MVV. However, the idea of a single creator and distributor of MVV disagrees with much organizational development literature.

To be effectively implemented, MVV will need buy-in from staff (Schmuck et al., 2012). Focusing on a single person developing and sharing MVV as the guide for a school leaves staff and other stakeholders out of the process. Furthermore, staff cohesion comes through a collaborative process (Rosen, 2013). In fact, organizations tend toward greater success in meeting goals when a collaborative process is used to determine direction and course corrections (Rosen, 2013). The use of collaborative teams can be more effective for developing MVV and sharing it with others, as well as creating the conditions for staff buy in and internalization of MVV (Lencioni, 2002).

Throughout the literature was the idea of shared or distributed leadership as a necessary tool for effective implementation of MVV for student success. Much of the literature disagrees with Cho et al. (2019), who suggest decentralized leadership might result in a negative impact when implementing mission and vision. Strong networks based on shared leadership can bring unity of purpose to an organization and check mission creep, which destabilizes efforts toward a common goal (Waite, 2010). Further, professional development partnerships helped staff stay on track and address their beliefs about needed changes (Doolittle et al., 2008). In large, urban high schools, issues with effective school change can arise due to professional isolation (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013). Department chairs can act as a cohesive leadership group (Kelley & Salisbury, 2013), in effect, distributing leadership which can make implementation of MVV more effective and staff buy-in more likely.

Unfortunately, most leaders ignore the importance of MVV in establishing effective school culture (Watkins & McCaw, 2008). A study examining graduate students in a continuing administrative program discovered a lack of understanding about the importance of internalizing and operationalizing MVV (Gurley et al., 2014). This finding supported Watkins and McCaw's (2008) research that few administrative students knew their school's MVV, which meant there was low alignment between MVV and daily practice. Considering research demonstrating the importance of operationalizing MVV to support effective school improvement and student success, the lack of knowledge about and importance of using MVV as guiding principles for daily practice is, indeed, disturbing.

Impact on Student Outcomes

Literature on the impact of using MVV in guiding daily practice repeatedly finds that using MVV as a filter for decisions throughout the school will positively impact student outcomes. This includes teaching practices. Teachers are considered to have the largest impact on student success (visible-learning.org, 2017). As stated earlier, Tichner-Wagner et al. (2016) found that effective high schools have a foundation of a shared MVV that is consistently communicated and promoted by all stakeholders within the building. Moreover, shared understanding and operationalization of MVV leads to increased student learning—the purpose of education (Gurley et al., 2016).

When implementation of MVV is used to guide strategic planning and resource allocation, schools can focus on providing effective PD and professional learning community (PLC) time to operationalize MVV. Further, school improvement and student achievement are positively connected to effective PLCs (Capenter, 2015). PD centered on MVV can focus on the development of practices that improve student outcomes (Sommers, 2009). Such a focus on

offering sufficient time for PD and PLC work requires an operationalized MVV to keep efforts toward increasing student success from straying.

Conclusion

Theories and research regarding the importance of MVV on school effectiveness support the idea that MVV statements and their implementation play a large role in improving school culture and increasing student outcomes. A healthy school culture is seen as the precursor to student success (Gurley et al., 2014; Watkins & McCaw, 2008). Additionally, in a study of well-, average- and poor-performing high schools in South Africa, school culture was identified as a key factor in determining school success as measured by test scores (VanDer Westhuizen et al., 2005).

Objective metrics as a sign of student success can provide tangible evidence of the impact of MVV. Accordingly, these metrics are often the target of school improvement efforts. In fact, school improvement efforts based on successful implementation of MVV, which includes staff buy-in and shared understanding, led to an increase in students' standardized test scores (Hays, 2013; Landeau et al., 2009). Furthermore, a study of four charter schools serving marginalized populations found that school culture based on implementation of MVV also led to improvement in graduation rates and college acceptance (Hays, 2013).

These types of improvements, however, are based on the level of implementation of MVV within a school (Anyamele, 2007; Calder, 2006; Gurley et al., 2014; Holosko et al., 2015). Therefore, it is critical staff and leadership not only have knowledge of, but also share a deep understanding of the importance of using a school's MVV (Gurley et al., 2014; Watkins & McCaw, 2008). Unfortunately, this type of understanding was found to be lacking in students of administrative graduate programs (Gurley et al., 2014; Watkins & McCaw, 2008). Given this

dearth of knowledge on the part of school leaders, how can school leaders hope to lead school improvement efforts toward a healthy school culture and improved student outcomes?

Shared understanding—a common interpretation of a school's MVV—is seen as a critical element in improving school culture and student outcomes. While researchers agreed on the importance of a common understanding of MVV as a guiding force for creating effective schools, they disagreed on the style of leadership necessary for implementing MVV. Some researchers suggested MVV should be developed by a school leader and then rolled out to the rest of the organization (Kose, 2011; Sommers, 2009). Further, Cho et al. (2019) suggested decentralized leadership may lead to negative results when implementing MVV.

On the other hand, other researchers suggested the opposite—that a model of shared leadership was more effective in developing shared understanding and commitment to MVV usage within the school (Carpenter, 2015; Farmer-Hinton, 2015; Gurley et al., 2014). This shared sense of purpose based on a common understanding of MVV statements' operationalization led to an improvement in school culture (Carpenter, 2015). In addition, shared understanding of MVV and expectations for its implementation meant decentralized leadership could be effective because teachers and other staff were able to make decisions based on this knowledge without having to get pre-approval (Jackson, 2002; Rosen, 2013). Shared understanding infused into the daily operations of a school will have everyone working toward a common purpose (Schmuck et al., 2012; Tichner-Wagner et al., 2016). Moreover, expanding shared understanding and expectations to students can lead to student ownership of learning (Tichner-Wager et al., 2016), which can lead to improved student outcomes.

Once a shared understanding and internalization of MVV occur, aligning daily actions with these principles is necessary. Anyamele (2007), Calder (2015, 2018), Fullan (2011), and

Holosko et al. (2015) found alignment between practice and MVV is foundational in effective organizations. Further, mission statements must be clear and focused to effectively align practice (MacLeod, 2016). Alignment will impact resource allocation, professional development activities, and strategic planning (Anyamele, 2007; Calder, 2018; McClenny & Dare, 2013). Moreover, aligning practice with MVV can provide consistency and reliability within the day-to-day operations of a school (Calder, 2018). In other words, it is necessary to align practice with MVV in order to create an effective school.

Research and theory literature underscored the importance of using MVV to create a healthy school culture found to lead to student success. To do so, school leaders and staff must know and internalize the MVV through a shared understanding of the expectations for daily practice aligned with the school's MVV. Unfortunately, Gurley et al. (2014) and Watkins and McCaw (2008) found school leaders were significantly lacking in their knowledge of their school's MVV. It follows, then, that this lack of knowledge means they cannot use the school's MVV to build a healthy school culture focused on increasing student learning. Furthermore, the absence of MVV as a filter for school policy and practice means schools will likely lack consistent expectations of practice.

Implementation of a strong, well-developed, clear, and focused MVV can guide school improvement efforts and lead to greater student learning. Research repeatedly outlines the positive impact of an operationalized MVV on a school's day-to-day functioning. As leaders, it is important for school administrators to know and implement MVV in order to create a healthy school culture. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of this knowledge among administrators (Gurley et al., 2014). Without knowledge and internalization of MVV, administrators will not be able to

operationalize MVV for unifying staff around a common goal, school improvement, and

increased student success.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Purpose of Study

This qualitative study examined teachers' perceptions of the use of their school's MVV statements to guide daily operations. The operationalization of MVV will create expectations and norms, which determines a school's culture (Schmuck et al., 2012). In other words, the daily actions and behaviors of those within the organization creates school culture.

Research Design

I used a qualitative research design to study how licensed staff perceive the use of mission, vision, and values in daily school operations. Using a qualitative research design provided the opportunity to examine a topic in depth, within its context, and understand it well, to present an organized set of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lietz et al., 2006). Yin (2016) also notes that when context is relevant to what is being studied, a qualitative approach is appropriate. Further, qualitative analysis allows for both differences and similarities within collected data (Graneheim et al., 2017). The question of how the use of a school's MVV is perceived has no clear or easily defined results and may produce data that are both in agreement and contradictory between participants.

The lack of easily defined results suggested an inductive approach to data analysis, meaning the researcher interpreted themes based on the data rather than using a deductive approach where theories or hypotheses are tested by gathering specific, measurable data, a hallmark of quantitative research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Additionally, qualitative analysis can use the initial theory or themes found in research literature to guide coding prior to analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The research question for this study was developed based on

themes found in existing research literature. This lens meant a qualitative study was most suited to increase understanding regarding the perception of the use of MVV in a school's daily operation.

Site Selection

To be a suitable site for this study, the school needed to have at least two of the three statements—mission, vision, or values—present and accessible by staff. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult to find a research site. Many districts were closed to research requests, and others did not return email requests. Therefore, to select a research site, I contacted an administrator at the university where I was enrolled, who then reached out to a known administrator at a high school in the Pacific Northwest. The high school administrator agreed to have their school as the site for this research.

Participants

A convenience sample was used to select participants. Criteria for inclusion were the following:

(1) The participant was a state-licensed staff member.

(2) The participant had worked at the school for at least three years.

A school administrator at a large high school in the Pacific Northwest was contacted and they sent an email to the school's teachers and additional licensed staff with fewer than 10-years' experience at the school, per the criteria listed above. There were fewer than four respondents, which was the minimum target number of participants for this study, so the administrator reached out to some staff members in-person to explain the research and request participation. Four participants volunteered to be included in the study—three licensed classroom teachers and

one licensed counselor. The counselor was included in the study due to a low response rate from teachers at the school.

Limitations of Participant Selection

Limitations of participant selection include the use of a convenience sample, the low participation rate, the use of volunteers, and the years of experience participants had within the school. With over 80 non-administrator licensed staff members, four participants constitute a small sample and may not be representative of how most teachers within the school perceive the use of MVV to guide daily school operations. This could present a bias in the findings. Further, the years of experience participants had within the school could further represent a limitation if teachers with more experience at the school had a different perception of the use of MVV to guide daily operations. Volunteer participants tend to be those with strong positive or negative opinions about the topic under discussion. Since participants voluntarily engaged in the study this could present a bias toward their perceptions of the use of MVV within the school.

The Researcher

After five years as a classroom teacher, I spent two years serving as a high school Associate Principal. I then returned to the classroom for a year. This research grew out of my experience as a K12 teacher and administrator.

Bracketing of Potential Bias

Qualitative researchers bring knowledge of their research topic to the interview process (Sorsa et al., 2015). Bracketing is a tool which helps create the balance between personalization during the interview process and "subjectivity without prejudice" (Sorsa et al., 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, bracketing allows for the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants, which helps the researcher stay open to participants' experiences despite the

researcher's previous knowledge and research focus (Sorsa et al., 2015). Bracketing plays a role in the interpretation process, so the researcher must be aware of their own pre-conceptions and how those may impact the concluding analysis (Bengtsson, 2016).

Bracketing was an ongoing process throughout the study. Acknowledging the influence of their own lived experiences is an essential part of the qualitative researcher's role (Karagiozis, 2018). As part of my bracketing process, I had to understand and recognize that my own experiences within the K12 school system, first as a teacher and then as an administrator, influenced my selection of the topic, methodology, and the literature included and excluded in the study. Moreover, these experiences influenced my development of the interview protocol and data analysis.

As a former school administrator, I had to acknowledge it could be difficult to hear staff criticism of common practices and decisions. At the same time, my understanding of the different demands and requirements administrators face each day may be unknown to other school staff, and therefore may not influence their perceptions. By acknowledging this dissonance, I could check my own biases and any urge to defend administrators against criticism. Further, I used a semi-structured interview process (described below) to ensure the participants could fully articulate their experiences while the discussion remained on topic.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Trustworthiness in qualitative research acknowledges that researcher and participant co-create meanings at the same time the researcher has done due diligence to create confidence in the data analysis, interpretation, and conclusions (Lietz et al., 2006). Polit and Beck (2014) identify credibility as an element of trustworthiness. Credibility arises from the researcher clearly describing the processes between the points of research—the purpose, the participants, the

method of data collection, the method of analysis, and the conclusions drawn. Two methods for establishing credibility are member-checking (Connelly, 2016) and intra-rater reliability, in which coding is done by the same researcher at two different points in time (Schilling, 2006). In this study, member checking, intra-rater reliability, and qualitative analysis were used.

Member Checking

Member checking was used to allow participants to review and validate the accuracy of the transcripts from the focus group and the interview. Member-checking controls researcher bias by ensuring participants' voices are elevated above the researcher's perspective (Lietz et al., 2006). Focus group participants were given copies of the transcript from the focus group and given instructions to do the following: (1) validate the accuracy of their words, and (2) clarify any areas where they felt it was necessary. The same instructions were given to the counselor when they received a copy of the transcript from the interview. Participants were told that a lack of response indicated acceptance of the transcript as submitted to them. One participant actively responded that they accepted the transcript as submitted to them.

Intra-rater Reliability

Intra-rater coding means the researcher coded the data at two separate points in time. This is an acceptable form of coding when outside raters are not available (Schilling, 2006). For this study, I coded the data three days after the member-checking was complete to ensure data was accurate, and again 60 days later.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis provided the opportunity to understand how the lived experiences of participants related to the themes that emerged from the data. Text was selected with the purpose of illustrating themes related to the research question. Using examples of the participants words

as they relate to the established themes, and then interpreting those words provides a measure of credibility and trustworthiness (Graneheim et al., 2016). Further, acknowledging my own pre-conceptions and background, and how they impact my coding, selected themes, and interpretations of the data, provided transparency in reporting the findings (Graneheim et al., 2016).

Data Sources

A focus group of three licensed teachers and an interview of a licensed counselor were conducted to gather data on how these staff members perceive the use of mission, vision, and values within their school. A focus group was the most appropriate for gathering data from the classroom teachers because it provided a quick and efficient format for collecting data from multiple participants in a setting that feels social (Krueger, 2000). Qualitative research is often framed from a constructivist approach since it allows for the development of co-constructed meaning by the participants without removing a measure of objectivity (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Additionally, the social feeling of the focus-group setting allowed for shared construction of reality because the participants had the same fundamental role within the school. Moreover, the interactions among the participants could yield additional insights due to the social context. This allowed for the gathering of data I may not have anticipated and that adds additional dimensions to the examination of participants' perceptions of the use of MVV in their school.

I conducted an interview with a licensed counselor. Because the counselor had a different role within the school, it was important to understand their experience of how the school's MVV statements were used in guiding daily school operations. An imbalance of power between researcher and participants can influence what participants are willing to share (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Though the counselor is not the researcher, they serve a different role within the

school and a similar imbalance of power may have existed between participants. In a focus group setting, classroom teachers may not have been willing to share certain aspects of their experience with a non-classroom staff member present, which could unduly bias the data collected. Given the different lens this participant brought to the discussion, the separate interview helped ensure the classroom teachers were not affected by the non-classroom staff member's role, nor the counselor by the teachers. Therefore, separating the participants based on their roles within the school was appropriate.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were gathered via a focus group consisting of three licensed classroom teachers, and an interview with a licensed school counselor. One potential limitation of a focus group is the lack of anonymity within the group itself. This could lead to participants withholding information or only giving partial information in the interest of protecting themselves, which can lead to incomplete or incorrect data. To protect the identities of the group members while gathering robust and true data, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix B) which included protecting the identities of the group members from others outside the focus group.

I used a semi-structured interview protocol to conduct the focus group and individual interview (Appendix A). A focus group was selected as the format for data gathering because a focus group allows for the possibility of unexpected data that may enrich the data set or lead to unanticipated findings. During the focus group, participants referred to and built on each other's comments, thus creating a more robust picture of their experiences.

The counselor was separated from the focus group because of their differing role within the school. Their role within the school could have provided an impediment to teachers speaking

freely, not only because of the counselor's different role within the school, but also because of the counselor's closer physical proximity and easier access to administrators.

The focus group and individual interview occurred via a recorded Zoom session, and the session was transcribed using temi.com, an online automated transcription service. The transcription was then compared to the recording for accuracy. Once I verified the transcription matched the words spoken by the participants, a copy of their session was sent to each participant. Participants were asked to verify their words and to confirm their responses accurately represented their thoughts and ideas. Further, participants were given the opportunity to expand or clarify any of their responses or contributions to the conversation. Participants did not make any changes.

The focus group and individual interview each began with collecting background data on the participants. I identified the mission statement as it had been given to me by a school administrator. When presented with this mission statement, participants identified additional mission, vision, and values statements. Since participants were to be presented with copies of the statements at the beginning of the interview, four statements were available for the focus group—two mission statements, one values statement, and one vision statement. During the counselor interview, an additional mission statement and vision statement were made known. Participants were allowed to reference any of the statements available during their session they felt applied to the topic under discussion.

Each participant was asked for their name, their role within the school, how long they had worked there, and whether they had been involved in the creation of the mission statement. Once participants had answered these questions, I began by asking the general research question and

allowing the conversation to flow naturally from that point forward, using the pre-determined questions only as necessary to ensure the interviews stayed on track.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative data analysis procedures were used to analyze the data collected from the interviews. Schilling (2006) identifies a written transcription of spoken language to be raw data that can then be analyzed. One approach to analyzing qualitative data is directed content analysis, in which themes in existing research are used to guide coding (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). This can then be combined with analyzing the data separate from existing themes to identify themes from within the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). Since I used a semi-structured interview process, I also had to allow for unanticipated data or themes to emerge.

Thematic coding means that more than single words can be used to identify a theme. Themes can be found in "a single word, a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or an entire document" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, p. 3). Intra-rater coding occurred at two separate points in time and at two levels each time.

The following process was used to analyze the data:

(1) Data were transcribed from oral to written text,

(2) Themes were defined as the unit of analysis,

(3) Data were initially coded, and definitions of codes were created when 10% and 50% of the data had been evaluated (Schilling, 2006),

(4) Themes were identified from the initial coding process,

(5) Data were coded again, 60 days after the initial coding,

(6) Themes were identified from the second coding process,

(7) Themes from first and second coding were compared and adjusted to ensure

agreement,

(8) Findings were reported, and

(9) Findings were analyzed and interpreted.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to examine licensed staff members' perception of the use of MVV in guiding daily school operations. Little of the relevant literature addresses the perceptions of non-administrative licensed staff members in this regard, instead focusing on the administrative and leadership aspects of implementing MVV. To collect as much genuine data as possible, I conducted a focus group of three teachers and an individual interview of a school counselor. In Chapter Four, I discuss the findings from these interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine licensed staff perceptions of the use of mission, vision, and values in guiding daily school operations. Three participants engaged in a focus group, and one participant engaged in an individual interview. Participants were separated due to their differing roles within the school. Their differing roles had the potential to affect how they felt about sharing their experiences. The goal was to obtain data that were as honest and thorough as possible.

In this section, my aim is to present the emergent themes related to the research question: How do licensed staff perceive their school's mission, vision, and values are used to guide daily school operations? The goal of the focus group and interview was to elicit participants' perceptions through a semi-structured format. Using such a format allowed unexpected information to emerge.

To make sense of and bring structure to the data collected during the focus group and interview, I organized the presentation of data by the six themes that emerged from the data collection process. When participants are quoted, stutters, repeated words or phrases, and filler words such as "uh," "like," and "um" are not reported unless their omission would alter the essential meaning of the statement. Any references to specific mission, vision, or values statements are paraphrased or altered to protect the identity of the school and district.

Demographic Information

Beaumont High School (BHS) (pseudonym) is a large high school in the Pacific Northwest serving over 1900 students in the Alameda School District (pseudonym). Staff

positions requiring licensing through the state's licensing agency include five administrators, 87 teachers, five counselors and psychologists, and a dean of students.

In reporting the data gathered from the participants, I made every effort to protect the identity of the participants, the school, and the district. Each participant or administrator has been given an androgynous pseudonym chosen from a list of the 20 most common unisex names in the United States (Flowers, 2015). This not only protects their identity within the school and district, but it also eliminates specific identifiers, such as gender, from the reporting. Because of the nature of the community within a single school, it is important to protect participants' identities to prevent consequences to their personal and professional lives from what was revealed during the focus group and interview.

Participants

Table 1 presents information for each participant in the study.

Table 1

Demographic information about study participants

Participant Name	Role	Years at the School	Years in Education	Subject Area
Casey	Classroom Teacher	6	13	History Leadership
Avery	Classroom Teacher	4	11	Math
Peyton	Classroom Teacher	8	15	History
Counselor Jaime	Counselor	7	Not provided	Not applicable

The Presence of Mission, Vision, and Value Statements

The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of the use of the mission, vision, and value statements to guide daily school operations. Of necessity, this means these statements must exist, be known by administrators and staff, and be understood as belonging to the school itself. In site selection, it was necessary to determine if at least two of the statements were present and accessible. My first task was to find these statements. I was able to locate a mission and vision statement for the school district, and a values statement for the school. I contacted Administrator Riley (pseudonym), an administrator at the school, for help in finding the school's mission statement. Administrator Riley referred me to the district website. In addition to mission and vision statements, the district website also lists four pillars and three beliefs.

As the focus group and interview began, I discovered the presence of six distinct statements, not including the district's pillars and beliefs: three mission statements, one values statement, and two vision statements. Since participants were to be presented with copies of the statements at the beginning of the interview, four statements were available for the focus group—two mission statements, one values statement, and one vision statement. During the counselor interview, the additional mission and vision statements were made known. Participants were allowed to reference any of the statements available during their session they felt applied to the topic under discussion. To protect the identity of the school and district, MVV statements will be paraphrased or altered to avoid anyone being able to backward map from the statements to the district and school websites.

At the district level, there are two district-specific statements: a mission statement and vision statement, and a values statement that is also used by BHS. Additionally, the district also publishes a set of beliefs and four pillars. At the school level, there is no official mission

statement published, but one of the participants read a statement that was on a poster on the wall of their classroom when they took a position at the school. The poster is in many classrooms throughout the school and teacher participants agreed the ideas in the statement functioned as the school's mission statement. The counseling center has its own mission and vision statement, but no unique values statement.

Participants were asked if they had a role in the creation of the mission, vision, or values statements. None of the teachers had a role in creating any of the statements. When asked if they knew by whom or when the statements had been developed, the consensus was that the district vision statement traced back to the current Superintendent, from their time as an administrator at the high school.

In contrast, the counselor had a role in the creation of the Counseling Center's vision statement, as did the administration and crisis therapists on campus. The counselor described the process as collaborative. When asked how buy-in was gained from the rest of the school staff, they said it wasn't sought. Instead, the statement "was accepted and embraced."

Themes

Six themes emerged during the data collection process: (1) an inconsistency between organizational levels in the use and reference of MVV, as well as the statements themselves, (2) a disconnect between the words and actions of administrators, (3) an absence of sustaining systems, (4) staff defense of administrators, (5) existing connections between daily practice and MVV, and (6) the anticipated impact if MVV was intentionally used to guide daily school operations.

Inconsistency Across and Within Organization Levels

Between the district, the school, and a department within the school, there are three distinct mission statements, two distinct vision statements and one distinct value statement. After discovering the presence of so many unique statements, the aim of the early portion of the discussion in each session shifted to become a sorting of what statements existed and how and by whom they were used.

Mission Statements. I began by showing the participants the initial mission and vision statements I had been directed to by Administrator Riley—the statements on the district website. I also read the statements aloud. After reading the statements, Peyton said that sometime after they began working at the high school, BHS published its own mission statement, but they did not know where to find it. "I know we've published our high school mission statement, maybe more than our district mission statement." Peyton could not recite the mission statement, but believed the statement contained the idea of creating lifelong learners for students and the community. "Those words are definitely in there."

There was a poster of the mission statement on the wall of Avery's classroom, and they read it to the group. "Inspire a love of learning in our children, families, and community to positively impact our world." The poster had been up in Avery's room when they moved in, and they noted that if it had not been there, they would not have known the school's mission statement. Neither the Student Handbook, the Curriculum Guide, nor the school website had published this statement.

The school has an additional mission statement in its counseling department: "To support students by treating them with dignity, honoring their unique capabilities and supporting them in

personal and social development, community involvement, academics and career planning."

Counselor Jaime said that "college planning" was specifically left out of the mission statement.

Vision Statements. A published vision statement only exists at the district-level. The

district's vision centers on building hope and resilience within an engaged community. These

ideas of "hope" and "resilience" were referenced often by participants, and Peyton said, "I know

Superintendent Harris (pseudonym) uses those words a lot." Peyton also said the vision

statement is used as part of the "beginning of the year rah-rah where the Superintendent talks to

the entire staff." They also note the presence of book studies and speeches that put forward the

ideas of hope and resilience. "[Superintendent Harris has] talked a lot about fostering hope in the

last couple of years. I think our school had some big meetings about building resilient

communities and investing in community resources to foster hope and build resilience." Avery

and Casey agreed with this perception of when the vision statement is referenced.

Though the district website is the only place where a published vision statement exists,

the school seems to have adopted the district vision as its own. Counselor Jaime says hope "…is

not necessarily our school word, but it's our district word—hope. Hope is big. Hope is big in our

school." They go on to say "…hope is our magic word" and "It's a big word in our school

district from our littles all the way through graduation."

There is an unpublished vision statement in the Counseling Center. "Students are

supported through individual planning, guidance, system supports, and responsive services

provided by staff, parents, and the community, so students can learn, live, contribute and work."

Values Statement. It is unclear whether the district values statement originated at the

high school or the district level, but its use pre-dates the participants' employment at the school.

The catchphrase has become a motto, or chant, within the school district and the community. Casey said,

> We have a phrase called *We are GREAT!* and it's probably the thing that's referenced the most around the district. At the high school, we have an acrostic for *We are GREAT!* where each letter stands for a different quality or trait we are trying to reach.

> Casey also noted the traits encapsulated in this catchphrase—being growth-oriented, responsible, educated, accepting, and trustworthy—are rarely mentioned, but the catchphrase itself is used ubiquitously. Avery and Peyton agreed. Counselor Jaime also said the catchphrase is widely known and frequently used. "…it's just a constant. But when we say *We are GREAT!* the whole community knows what that means."

> Except the phrase, as it is used in daily life, does not appear to mean what the acrostic suggests it means. Long before school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this catchphrase became shorthand for "We're all in this together." Casey said, "…it's typically just referenced as, 'We're all in this together.' You know, 'Hey, we're all going through tough times. *We are GREAT!*'"

> Counselor Jaime echoed the idea of the catchphrase meaning "We're all in this together." When referencing discipline practices, they said that when working with students in trouble, the idea of *We are GREAT!* is embedded in how a student's discipline is approached, but not from the standpoint of the values the acrostic espouses. Counselor Jaime said,

> [The reality is] that you did something…that you broke a rule and what that means. But, also, moving forward, what we're going to do from here. We're not just going to leave you on the side of the road…We're all in this together. And that's, I almost just said it.

That's when we say, "*We are GREAT!*" You know, we're all in this together. So, you're

with us. Make better choices.

Counselor Jaime believes *We are GREAT!* has become an ingrained mindset and

language within the school, district, and community.

Counselor Jaime serves on the *We are GREAT!* committee within the school. Peyton

used to lead the committee, but no longer participates. In discussing their work on the committee,

Counselor Jaime said, "I feel that we are constantly doing things and bringing it to light, the

Pillars…" referencing the four Pillars on the district website. The district's Pillars include

building a resilient community, equity and inclusion, academic achievement, and safety.

Difference Between Words and Actions

A second theme that emerged from the data collection process is a difference between

what administrators say is important and what happens within the school. Casey described it as a

"disconnect." This was seen in four sub-categories: (1) unclear expectations, (2) an absence of

accountability, (3) the annual school planning process, and (4) relationships. In each of these

areas, teacher participants described discrepancies between words and actions, while the

counselor felt there were no discrepancies.

Unclear Expectations. In several areas, teacher participants noted a lack of clarity in

expectations. Examples given by participants included expectations during comprehensive

distance learning (CDL), onboarding, and student discipline.

Comprehensive Distance Learning. During the mandatory school closures and the

adoption of CDL during the Covid-19 pandemic and quarantine, teachers were asked to give

students "grace" when it came to meeting deadlines for schoolwork. Avery said,

…we were always taking late work. Forever. And then we talked about installing…some

cutoff days so that teachers don't have to be grading a full quarter's-worth of work the

day before grades are due. So [the administration said], "Here are the late work cutoff

days," but also, "You don't have to use them if you don't want to," and also, "It's up to

you."

Avery said they would alert their students to an upcoming cutoff day and the students

would respond that they could turn their work in whenever they wanted to. Avery went on to

say, "Why did we even do this? Why do I care if no one else is doing it? This is [unclear]

arbitrary. Date of doom. I'm happy to call it that, but I thought it was school policy so…" Peyton

noted they, themselves, did not enforce the late-work cutoff date in their classes.

The teachers all noted there is an expectation to build relationships with students, but

during CDL how that was supposed to happen was unclear. When asked about the impact of

CDL on students, the counselor noted there were some student populations that would not

engage in Zoom sessions and that outreach to students was inconsistent. Avery further noted that

the expectation to build relationships with students was not supported by CDL policies when it

came to students' class schedules. Avery said,

Our kids have changed a lot in this model. Like, the actual children in the seats in my

classroom, were on the screen in my class, because of electives changing at the quarter,

because a semester has ended, their schedule has to get all reworked. So, half the kids in

my class are in someone else's class now. So that doesn't help build those relationships

and engagement.

Onboarding. Another area where participants noted the presence of unclear expectations

was in onboarding for new teachers, club leaders, and/or department heads. Avery said that when

they took over as a department head, they asked for the list of duties and were told that no list existed. Avery said, "I just kind of have to stumble forward and be okay when people yell at me. So, that is the strategy. Again, it's just a massive disconnect in the system." Casey echoed this sentiment. "I've been the advisor for multiple clubs and when you ask them, 'What do [I] need to do?' they say, 'Talk to the person that was the advisor before you.'"

   Progressive Discipline. Teachers also need to fill in gaps for each other when it came to progressive discipline practices. The steps in the progressive discipline process were unclear, but the expectation for progressive discipline seemed to exist. Avery said,

> At the beginning, they'll say whatever, and you've been through eight-and-a-half hours of training on that same day, so who knows what you remember? And then it's really a lot of just figuring it out and talking to other people. Hopefully they have some good experiences and also have been communicated with about this stuff and can help you.

Casey said,

> I think there's the expectation, but there's not the training or follow-through. On the referral form it says, "What steps have you taken before?" You know, parent conference, has got all these different things listed. But…we don't train on that.

Peyton felt the process for discipline was inconsistent, and the referral form did not cover steps the teacher had taken prior to sending a student to the office.

> …something as simple as the referral form…we don't really have a process for warnings. I've heard of students who ticked a teacher off that day and they're suddenly in the Vice Principal's office for what they perceive as the first time they've committed a violation. If we had a more formalized process, like, "Well, did you talk to this kid first? What steps did you take before you sent him to my office?"

Casey further noted that during new teacher orientation, the administrator

…maybe spent an hour with us, saying, 'Here's the discipline practices of the district.'

That's the last time…I think that in the last six years we may have had one other training

on discipline. I think that the expectation exists, but…because they told us a long time

ago, and it's not something that is reiterated or built upon…that's where I think it kind of

falls apart.

The teachers go on to say there is a lack of communication between administration and teachers when it comes to discipline for a particular student. Casey said that when they had students who were suspended or made violent threats, they would be back in the classroom "without even an email saying they're returning." They went on to say,

It's not that they're doing these things with kids and with the families, it's that we don't

know what's happening, so we can't be supportive as a team to work together for

something that's…We send them down to the office, they do the discipline, and they

eventually come back and we don't know what happened.

Avery recounted their first years in the building as "being with really rowdy kids."

I had plenty of time to get used to how to wrangle discipline, which it wasn't clear from

the get-go, as a new teacher, right? Like, who I talk to, what is considered an

infraction…'cause it's been kind of different depending on what school I'm at.

Avery said that when a student blew smoke with a vape pen into their face and was sent to the office, the student was "back in my classroom a minute later and smirking, like, 'I can do what I want.'" They went on to say they talked to the administrator in charge of discipline and "sorted it out." Avery also describes a different incident where a student threw a phone at them, and in that instance, there was a conference and "[the administrator] made a little bit more of an

effort…so I know it can happen." Avery believes other structures would have to be in place, as well.

> That had to happen on my prep or they had to send someone up to watch my class, so that I could be away. It feels like they would have to set up a lot of extra staffing to kind of facilitate those values, which would be amazing. I know the capability is there, but are we going to do it routinely? And are we going to do it transparently so that a new teacher who comes in knows that's how things are handled because that's part of the culture?

Counselor Jaime's perception of student discipline is that it is consistent across students for similar offenses and is designed to leave the student with a sense of hope and resilience. "The discipline that is given at our school is done with dignity and respect for the student." Counselor Jaime also felt student discipline practices aligned with school values.

> **Accountability.** If they tell us that it's going to be a school thing and then it's up to people to do it, then why tell us it's a school policy?
>
> —Avery

The absence of accountability was a persistent theme during the interview with the teacher participants. The teachers identified several areas where administrators would say something was important but there would be no follow-up to ensure teachers were implementing the policies, programs, or practices. Each teacher participant described the work of a team or committee they had or currently served on where the group produced something to be implemented and there was no administrative follow-up to ensure the implementation occurred. The lack of administrative follow-through frustrated the participants.

Peyton said,

We've all served on teams that put together school-wide initiatives to help—Avery's on

AVID, which works with lesson planning and engagement. I was on the *We are GREAT!*

committee, which worked on school culture. Casey does Leadership, which I think is

engagement. Sometimes, you feel like you put together these activities for the staff and

then they just poo-pooed them and don't do them and don't care because it's not

necessarily something we're evaluated on. I quit the *We are GREAT!* committee because

I was just tired of meeting resistance and kind of frustrated with the staff not embracing

it. Like, they just won't do a lesson and there's not any administrative follow-through.

So, you'll plan this really great school lesson. You'll say, "How did it go with your first

period class?" and they'll say, "Well, my teacher didn't do it." That was hard because

there was no follow-up or expectation that you deliver it, even though they say that's our

vision.

Avery added,

I totally echo that. It feels like every time when we started doing the climate and culture

lessons, that, obviously, you worked really hard to put together and do that for the school,

it didn't feel like admin would do anything if you didn't. They're just like, whatever, we

went through it. There [were] no expectations.

Casey described a similar situation.

My *Leadership* students make video announcements that the whole school is supposed to

show every Monday morning. We consistently have teachers that don't show them, and I

will go to admin and say, "I need you to go around cause we…it's announcing things for

different clubs for the whole campus." And then they'll say, "Okay, we'll do that." They

never…there's never any consequences for people that just flat refuse to do it. So, then it
just shows them that, yeah, it doesn't matter.

The lack of implementation accountability was also cited in the late-work policy adopted
during CDL, which was mentioned previously.

Administrative Modeling. In discussing times when teacher participants felt there was a
lack of accountability, they also noted a lack of administrative modeling when it came to
expectations. Avery mentioned the idea of giving grace to students but did not see administrators
as offering the same grace to teachers. Avery said that someone from the district office wondered
why there were no teachers who wanted to teach summer school. "[I said], 'I don't know. Maybe
because we've been burning the candle at five ends?' There's no more left for us. Where's the
grace for us so that we can bounce back?"

Casey offered another example. Teachers are asked to build relationships with students.
Casey said administrators want teachers to go outside the curriculum to build those relationships.
As a *Leadership* advisor, Casey suggested they lead team-building activities at each staff
meeting so relationships could also be fostered between administrators and staff. Casey said,

They said, "That's awesome." So, the first one I did, they cut me off midway through,
they let me do the second one, and then the third one they cancelled. So, I don't
feel…But they…they said, "That's a great idea!" But they actually said, "We don't have
enough time." So, they're saying, "In your classroom, we want you to stop doing
curriculum and develop relationships with the kids. But in our staff meetings, we don't
have time."

Avery agreed. "And not just that. Admin needs to somehow foster, like, 'Yeah. This has
value.' Like, us, as people, as fellow teachers, it has value, the time we spend together." They

continued, "It feels like there needs to be like, 'I'm modeling this for you' or, 'I'm making it really clear why we're including this.'"

Impact of the Teachers' Union. Teacher participants suggested that the lack of accountability for non-curricular initiatives might stem from the presence of a strong union and the sense that "administrators are very nervous to ruffle union feathers." Casey elaborated.

> I don't think that teachers feel a need or, I mean, I don't…I haven't had an administrator coming to my classroom all year, so there's no fear of 'I actually need to do…' I could be doing whatever I want until I got a parent complaint. No one would know.

None of the teacher participants felt observations or annual evaluations focused on the school and district's MVV. Peyton said,

> If our mission statement is to foster hope and engagement, that's not the things we're evaluated on as a teacher or given feedback on. So, they say, 'This is what we're supposed to do' and then we have to fill out a very long matrix about our attendance and our lesson planning.

Peyton said a focus on numbers, such as credits and grades, contradicted the mission. Avery agreed, saying they felt like there's a juxtaposition between what is used to define a school as successful—credits earned, attendance, graduation rate—and the expectation to form "relational capacity." Avery said, "Again, we're not being assessed on those things. That's not what all of our interventions are for. It's about deficit credits…about not meeting standards."

Evaluation. Casey noted that they had not been evaluated since the middle of the previous school year. They said that in the year prior to COVID-19 closure, an administrator may have visited their classroom once, and not at all during CDL. "So, they're not in my classroom, which I think is a compliment, but also, we're not checking to make sure these things

are happening." Casey felt there was talk of fostering hope and doing relational activities, but administrators neither checked to make sure the expectations were being carried out, nor did they schedule time for teachers to focus on these goals. Instead, time together focused on hard data.

Casey summed it up succinctly: "You value what you put time into and when you say something in a meeting, but then you never follow up on it, I feel like you don't actually value that, so I don't need to value that."

School Improvement Plan. A school improvement plan (SIP) is the annual plan a school creates to guide its focus for the following school year. The SIP encapsulates the school's goals, how they will be achieved, and who is responsible for different elements of the plan. When asked about the SIP, participants did not see the SIP as relating to the MVV. Instead, they perceived it as a focus on tangibles such as graduation and attendance data rather than the intangibles like hope, engagement, and relationships. Participants viewed this as another disconnect between what administrators claimed was important and what was measured. The participants felt the SIP had things backwards. Casey said, "So…fostering hope and engagement. If we do those things, we're going to have high graduation rates and good attendance. Instead, we look at attendance rates and graduation rates and wonder how to get it better."

Engagement vs Passing. Peyton expanded on the idea of focusing on hard data rather than the values administration claims are important. Peyton said there is a disconnect between the value of engagement and what happens in class. They feel there is a discrepancy between the claim of valuing engagement and the push to pass students. "I feel like that's sometimes talking out of both sides," Peyton said. When it comes to rigor and graduation data, Peyton continued, "They don't tell you to pass students, but I feel like they're telling you to just check the mark sometimes."

Avery felt this was especially present—and problematic—in the math department. Avery said the issue is that students in this situation are passing but don't know the material well enough to be successful in the next course.

> You have to know what's before to go...like, if you can't solve an equation, you can't solve a linear equation, you can't solve a quadratic equation. It's very difficult to progress. But…we keep getting, 'Okay. We're going to do a reboot and…they're going to make up these credits or retake the test' and then they pass…They got a D and they got a credit and they still don't know it.

Avery contrasts this with a previous school where they've worked. "We did a whole learning life project and we connected different things and I fostered communication…"

Fostering Values, Hope, and Resilience. Participants felt the absence of time to focus on fostering relationships with students was one of the largest disconnects between the stress on values, building hope and resilience, and what was given time within the school day. Without a specific time set aside for relationship-building activities within the classroom, or administrative oversight to ensure the activities were being carried out, participants felt this was something they were not expected to focus on if it came at the expense of content, grades, or other concretely measurable data metrics. Participants did not see fostering values, hope and resilience as part of the SIP process.

When it came to fostering the intangibles, especially hope, Peyton wondered what would happen if the expectation was to notice positive behaviors and data instead of focusing on negative data. They said,

> We're required to send home an email halfway through the quarter to all of our kids in danger of failing. So, I organize my gradebook by zero…But what if I was required to

send an email to all the A Bs and Cs that I organized my gradebook in? What you're

required to do is what you're going to focus on. So, if I was required to focus on positive

behavior, then I would notice it and foster it probably.

Participants felt the lack of time afforded to foster values was a key factor in the feeling

the values were not important as part of their teaching day. Peyton said,

If you don't set aside time for it, it's going to get replaced with Chemistry or US History

or whatever your subject is, cause that's what we're passionate about, right? So, we feel

like [we] have to cover all these things. So, if the school set aside time, it would show

they valued it and that it was important.

Avery described the Positive Messaging System (PM), where teachers sent parents and

guardians positive messages about their student. Avery felt parents had been so inundated with

emails since the beginning of CDL that positive messages were getting missed. "I would get

responses like, 'Thank you for telling me this. This is great. Little Jimmy's doing awesome.' Not

anymore. Someone's working hard to keep that thing running and no one's using it."

Casey mentioned the *We are GREAT!* award, given to students who embodied different

values. They said, "We would nominate students that met any one of those different criteria. So,

this person was goal-oriented, we would nominate them, and they would get an award." When it

came to awards, Peyton added,

I think maybe celebrating these things more would help, too. Like, they're intangibles,

right? You can post Championship Football Team, but you can't really [post]

Championship Hope Giver or whatever. But if they celebrated, maybe, those

characteristics more, that could foster [them].

In contrast, Counselor Jaime felt programs and decisions to support students were being made in alignment with fostering values, and especially hope and resilience. They described several clubs and resources available to students, as well as grants to populations that may be disconnected from school (the grants are being held until students return to buildings).

I checked for understanding by saying, "So what I'm hearing is the programs and the decisions that are being made in supporting students are really designed to foster hope and possibility." Counselor Jaime responded, "Exactly. A hundred percent hope and possibility in whatever meets them, where they are at."

Relationships. While teacher participants noted the absence of values and other intangibles in the SIP, they felt building relationships with students was a key to student success. They also felt building relationships with students needed to be modeled through building relationships with staff. As mentioned previously, Casey described a situation in which they had created relationship-building activities for the staff but was not allowed to complete them due to "lack of time," per the administration. Avery said one issue with building relationships with other staff members is how much work each person has. "If we spend…too much time on things that are not work related, they're just like, 'I'm busy. I have things to do.' It's easy to get into that mindset."

Peyton felt that setting aside time to build relationships with students was how the school could help build hope and resilience in students, but the efforts get bogged down in the daily grind. CDL had a significant impact on teacher workload and how many unique students they had in their classes throughout the year. Avery described a class schedule where an entire school year in a single subject was compressed into a semester because classes were only being held four at a time instead of the usual six, and electives changed at the end of a quarter instead of the

semester, so student schedules were continually changing. Under such a model, participants felt building relationships with students was even more challenging.

As mentioned earlier, Casey felt the SIP process worked backward, focusing on quantitative data instead of the intangibles of building hope and resilience. They felt that by building hope and resilience, the quantitative data would improve, but that the SIP was not created through that lens. Peyton said,

> I think the students are super astute and they can tell if a teacher worries about classroom engagement or worries about making their lesson relevant and full of hope. And so, I think if that was something that was on the front of our minds, it would make a difference.

The teachers added that having more time to talk about hope and less time spent on talking about grades, "…kids would feel happier on campus. I don't think we have very much time for pep talks and inspiring hope."

Absence of Systems

When discussing the absence systems within the school, teacher participants felt it was not necessarily programs or other initiatives themselves, but the lack of functional or sustaining systems to support them after implementation. Avery said, "There's all these amazing little seedlings that just get blown down in a hurricane, and…they never get a chance to grow to their full…height." Peyton said administrators try to work with their vision

> …but I almost feel like they're really great firemen. They're just running around, putting out the most recent fire and they're doing it to the best of their ability, but…when it comes to …creating systems…we don't see systems necessarily created to support or

enhance these things. They're using them on a day-to-day basis, but it's not always filtering all the way down.

Positive Messaging System. Previously, the Positive Messaging System—where teachers sent positive messages to students' parents or guardians—was mentioned in reference to the disconnect between what administration says is important and what is given time, evaluated, or a subject of accountability. Participants felt the PM could support students' developing the values set out in *We are GREAT!* and the district message of hope and resilience, but it's an initiative without a sustaining system and will often get lost in the shuffle of daily work.

Casey said, "I think it's the same thing that happens: It gets introduced. We talk about it. They'll mention it every six months and say, 'Hey, by the way, send out some positive emails,' but the administration doesn't use it." Avery expanded, "Someone's working hard to keep that thing running, and no one's using it."

Ninth-Grade Success Team. If teachers and the counselor disagree on other aspects of how mission, vision, and values are connected to school operations, the Ninth-Grade Success Team (NST) is a place where there is solid agreement. While NST is a program that suffers from a lack of sustaining systems that will carry it beyond the ninth-grade year, all participants felt it was a successful program that started incoming students on the right path for graduation. "In getting your students that are on track to graduate by the time they leave their freshman year, in the highest possible percentage that you can, is a precursor for them graduating from high school," Counselor Jaime said. The teachers agreed with Jaime.

Peyton felt NST

…embodies the vision of Beaumont, getting kids engaged in school. I think their thinking is, if they do that at the ninth-grade level, then they'll keep it going throughout. So, they

hired one person who heads it up at teacher salary and then several aides to make phone

calls and congratulate students and stuff. I think it's pretty cool.

Avery said BHS had spent a lot of time, money, and resources to run NST for students in

their ninth-grade year, and that may be why it was successful. "One of the reasons the Ninth-

Grade Success is working so well is because they're pouring a ton of money and staffing into it.

Our administration is very good at giving autonomy to people that are running programs."

Participants felt the NST was a collaborative effort, where teachers, counselors and

administrators used the data to decide on interventions to support incoming students, even

something as straightforward as a phone call to help build relationships and get students to take

ownership of their learning and performance in different classes. Avery said, "If they just sent

out a list and said, 'Okay, you have these kids go to this room,' half those people wouldn't turn

up.'" Stressing the collaborative aspect of NST, Avery continued, "All of us being there in the

same room and collaborating kind of makes the dream work."

Counselor Jaime felt that during CDL, teachers were always giving students hope

through NST. In fact, they said they were "hyper focusing" on ninth grade students. The idea

behind NST is that by giving incoming students a solid foundation for the following high-school

years, students were more likely to graduate. "…if things that happen in a student in their

freshman year, that really is a precursor to how things are going to end up," Counselor Jaime

said. "We just do all sorts of different ways in meeting with the students in different tiers and

interventions to find success."

The problem? There was no system in place to sustain the kind of attention NST offered

beyond the ninth-grade year. Counselor Jaime discussed the difficulties NST faced during CDL

and the issues it will present when students return to in-building learning.

I want my mentor to only concentrate on 70% freshmen and 30% sophomores that we knew this year, oh gosh, they're still going to be pretty fragile…You hope to do their ninth grade, get them able and mature enough to be able to fly, then their sophomore year. But I call them Froshmores, what we're going to have next year, because we still have those freshmen that haven't yet warmed up and got it. We're still going to need to work with them at least through semester one."

"There hasn't been any follow up after ninth grade," Avery said, and Casey added, "I think good things are done really well when they hire somebody and give them a responsibility. I think admin is so overworked that they are not able to do it." Peyton agreed. "It's…similar to the other things where we talk about it and we do something and then we just assume it's going to happen without continued effort."

Professional Development. Teacher participants felt there were problems with professional development. They described PD offered by the school as haphazard and lacking a solid annual plan. Casey said,

Instead of having systems in place before the year starts…I don't think that they plan out the professional development for the entire year. I feel like they should plan out the entire year['s] professional development that…is meeting certain aspects of our mission or of our goal. I think that they plan out the days that we're doing professional development and then as we get closer, they'd say, "Who can fill in this time that we scheduled?"

Again, the feeling that PD involved ideas that are delivered but lack follow-up training or accountability was presented when discussing professional development. Also, there was the feeling information was given to teachers at times when they were not able to sufficiently process it. As noted before, Avery said, "…at the beginning, they'll say whatever, and you've

been through eight-and-a-half hours of training that same day. So, who knows what you remember?"

Counselor Jaime spoke of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) during our conversation. I asked what kind of training staff received on ACEs, and how it impacts students and teaching practices. Counselor Jaime said, "I can't remember, but it was a while ago." They said there was a speaker who gave a presentation. The staff also took the ACEs evaluations. When asked if there was any type of follow-up learning, Counselor Jaime said, "I feel like…our site council addresses that with the readings and things that they provide for us." They continued, "Since I'm part of the prevention team, that handles all my professional development…so I'm not privy to the other ones." Counselor Jaime also noted that when students return to in-building learning after nearly a year-and-a-half of CDL, they anticipate many students' ACEs will have increased, "even the ones that are supposed to be okay."

Processes. Teacher participants said they wanted to see systems in place that would help foster values within the school culture. They noted areas that lacked systems such as discipline practices, onboarding new teachers, club leaders, and department heads, the PM, and the NST. Many of the comments teachers made about the lack of these systems have already been quoted or paraphrased earlier in this chapter.

About the onboarding issues, Casey said, "There's areas where teachers or staff members have building gaps, but because of that, they haven't realized that there's a systemic problem that exists."

Staff Cohesion. I feel like we have many kinds of micro-cultures all over the school, rather than one group.

—Casey

When discussing staff buy-in to the mission, vision, and values, teacher participants noted there was not a single, cohesive philosophy throughout the school. The lack of follow-up on initiatives after they are introduced led to the feeling a single teacher could decide what their values were within the teaching day rather than needing to buy into values administrators said were important. Casey said,

> I get to choose my own values if you don't really tell me what's important to you. So, if you say something three years ago and then think that's carrying forward without reinforcements or you coming in and evaluating me on that and giving me feedback on my ability to do that, then you're telling me that that doesn't really matter. So, I get to create my own set of values. We have 80-something teachers at school; we have 80-something sets of values that exist.

The physical structure of the school also presented a barrier to cohesion. Casey described a campus with multiple buildings, multiple sections within each building, and multiple hallways within each section. Avery even described her department as it's "own little kingdom." Casey went on to say that even within hallways they noticed different cultures. Casey added, "I think that most of the school is attempting to work towards a positive direction, but we're not all necessarily working towards the same positive direction or the same thing at the same time." Avery added there were teachers who had not seen each other in years because of the size and physical structure of the school. "The only reason I know where some of the classrooms are is because I had to tour the campus with my Freshmen this year."

The presence of "little kingdoms" and the differing values they have can be felt by the students, according to participants. Casey, Avery, and Peyton all agreed students knew there

were different expectations in different classes and which teachers had which level of

engagement with their job—either all in, just about grades, or marking time. Casey said,

> Students treat us like we're divorced parents. They know what they can get away with in
>
> one room, what they can get away with in a different room, and what's expected of them
>
> in one room may not be what's expected of them in a different room. So, they know that
>
> there's no uniform expectations, and so, they are frustrated…"

Casey goes on to give an example of the school policy that students can get a breakfast

and eat it in their first period class. However, one of Casey's second-period students tells them

the first-period teacher does not let them eat breakfast in class. Casey understood the school

policy of letting students eat in their first-period class as a school-wide expectation. They said,

> So, students are frustrated that things are not the same. They're frustrated that grading
>
> policies are different. They're frustrated that they get treated differently in different
>
> classrooms—and that's with the good kids. And then the kids that are behavior problems
>
> are trying to play you against each other, depending on which class it is.

Avery said getting everyone on the same page "regardless of what they teach or what

building they're in, would be very helpful."

Defense of Administrators

While acknowledging their frustrations and the administration's role in them, teacher

participants were also intentional about defending their administrators against implication of

fault. Casey said,

> I do think we have a great administrative staff. I feel like I'm complaining a lot right
>
> now, but the things that are not done well, or…it's not because they're not trying and it's
>
> not because they don't do a good job. I think they're overworked. I think that they don't

have enough time to be able to deal with some of these larger issues, but I think that we have great people in place.

Participants felt school administrators tried to use the vision to foster hope and resilience, but they were hampered by too many areas of focus, where administrators had to deal with what was right in front of them. They said, "I think they make the effort. I just think they are too strapped to really…I don't think it's intentional. I think they're trying to foster hope, but they're just triaging." When discussing administrators' role in supporting initiatives to acknowledge and promote the values espoused by *We are GREAT!*, Peyton said, "I would say in administrators' defense, though, there's a lot of stuff going on. So, to put in initiatives or to celebrate those qualities, I think would have been another layer of difficulty."

When discussing the absence of systems, Casey described administrators as "really great firemen." One area where teacher participants saw this was when it came to discipline, but they were quick to defend school administrators. Casey said,

> We have 1800 students, and we have a Vice Principal and a Dean of Discipline, and I think it just becomes a mass production game. I mean, I don't know how I could do a better job of it…they're up against it…it takes a lot of time to do these things really well, but I think that they just ended up having to have an assembly line going through their office.

Casey also felt the administrators were "working from behind all the time" at the same time they felt administrative staff was "great."

Another example of administrators being overworked was the hiring of additional staff for the NST. Casey said, "I think good things are done really well when they hire somebody and give them a responsibility. I think that admin is so overworked that they are not able to do it."

Avery also felt administrators were overworked and could not get into classrooms enough. After telling their students the principal was coming to talk to them and it would be a good time to ask the principal questions, an upper classman came into the room carrying an attaché case. The students thought this was the principal. Of the administrators, Avery said, "Freshmen, they're funny. But they don't even know them by sight. Right? So, the admins have so much to do, and so many things that they're…parsing their day out that kids aren't even aware of them."

Counselor Jaime praised the administrators for their role in promoting student voice. Prior to CDL, students had a platform for making their voices heard by administration. Counselor Jaime said, "I was really proud of our admin and district office for sitting on the outside of the circle, listening." Counselor Jaime also felt the access staff and students had to admin was greater than at other schools. "In talking to people from cohorts that work in…different schools, I couldn't ask for a better admin. When people say they don't have access, if they don't have this or that…I don't understand that."

Existing Connections to Mission, Vision, and Values

I asked participants where they specifically saw existing connections between programs, policies, and practices and the school's and district's MVV. Many of the programs and initiatives they felt aligned with the school's MVV were the same ones they saw as lacking sufficient support and/or having insufficient accountability.

COVID-19 Pandemic Programs. While it is beyond the scope of this research to delve into the impact of school closures because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is impossible to discuss programs and initiatives within a school without addressing how those initiatives and programs fared during CDL. In the case of BHS, participants felt the school and district implemented programs designed to foster hope and resilience in students. One policy participants

saw as aligned with the vision to foster hope and resilience was the CDL expectation for "grace" when it came to due dates for student work. Peyton described some of the other pandemic programs—free lunches, Zoom meetings with counselors, teacher checks on students for social-emotional wellbeing—but said many of these, especially the connections between adults and students, were not as strong as they could have been.

> You could Zoom in with a counselor, but my friend is one of the counselors and [they] said that rarely happened. Teachers were supposed to be checking in on their students for the social-emotional wellbeing, but again, nobody checked on us. So, I'm not sure how many teachers really did that or directed kids to services.

On-Campus Resources. BHS also has a wide variety of resources and services students could access on-campus. Avery described it as a "strip mall" of services. "We have a lot of services…on campus. We have the health clinic and…there's just places kids can go on campus." These services are both district-led and in partnership with Community-Based Organizations. The school also hired two additional counselors, which Peyton describes as resources for helping students build resilience. BHS also has community resources for students with housing and food insecurity.

Programs and Initiatives. Participants described a variety of existing initiatives and programs they see as aligning with the MVV. Avery saw the PM as a way to improve interactions with parents, and Peyton believes a focus on the positive aligns with the MVV. Participants felt NST was a strong program that built the foundation for hope and resilience in students that would carry them through the remaining high school years. Peyton said there were several programs aligned with building hope.

I think we have really great programs on campus…Like, College Dreams helps kids who don't think they can afford post-secondary school with scholarships. We have some awards in our [unclear] that are called the Growth Mindset Award, where a kid who really overcame something big was nominated by a teacher. We have some really great programs to engage students that maybe aren't cool with sit-and-learn stuff. Like, seek career and technical programs. Our Career Center really celebrates kids who get into college, and we have College Signing Day…I think we do a lot of things to help with the hope part.

Counselor Jaime mentioned the *We are GREAT!* awards, as well. They described the awards as a focusing on a different value each month. "This month is empowered. This month is accepting. This month…" Counselor Jaime felt this was one way the values became ingrained in the everyday language and mindset at BHS.

Casey saw the push to grow the clubs on campus as aligned with the MVV. They said there are clubs for all different kinds of students and there is a focus on all students. Participants also spoke generally of equity teams and equity initiatives within the school as aligning with the MVV.

Counselor Jaime is a member of the Prevention Team, which looks at areas that need change and "We just mentioned a thought of potentially something and [the administration] is full force and involved in a change." They said most administrators had worked internally, as teachers, before becoming administrators. Because of this, Counselor Jaime felt the MVV were ingrained in how the administrators thought and acted, so any decisions the administrators made would be in alignment with MVV.

Waving a Magic Wand

I asked participants if we could wave a magic wand and everything was in alignment with the MVV, what they felt would be the impact on the school culture, their experience as staff members, and the student experience.

Counselor Jaime felt the school was already being run in alignment with the MVV. Teacher participants felt there would be differences if the MVV were more intentionally used. Casey felt there would be an elimination of micro-cultures, and Avery echoed this when they said, "…if there was a magic wand…trying to get everyone on the same page…would be very helpful."

Participants also expressed the feeling expectations would be clearer and more consistent, and there would no longer be large gaps in teacher knowledge of policies and practices, nor would there be inconsistencies in practices in other areas of school management, such as discipline and evaluation. Teachers also felt aligning practices with MVV would result in the creation of clear systems that could sustain programs going forward. Additionally, Avery felt these systems would also be very clear on responsibilities and accountability measures. The teachers felt it would also have a positive impact on students, creating a stronger sense of community, and allowing administrators time to be more visible and known by students. Peyton also felt alignment would change the conversation to focus on the positive and give teachers support and time to focus on relationship-building and instilling hope and resilience in students.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this study was to explore licensed staff members' perception of the use of mission, vision, and values in guiding daily school operations. I recognize that the focus group and interview do not cover the totality of participants' experiences within the school. I also

recognize it is likely participants have not explicitly thought about how the mission, vision, and values connect to what happens on a day-to-day basis within the school prior to participating in this research.

The themes that emerged from the data seemed to be true for teachers whether they worked in physical classrooms or online during CDL. There was the feeling that the administration meant well and that in the main office, administrators were trying to implement their vision, but were hampered by the number of issues needing attention each day. Though participants felt there is a significant disconnect between what administrators say is important and what happens during the school day, their defense of administrators suggests both a form of resignation that what is happening in their schools is simply the way things are, and a simultaneous and deep respect for those who lead their school. The counselor was also protective of administrators, feeling any outside criticism of the school, or how it was run, was unjustified.

Participants agreed there were the seeds of good programs designed to support students through the final stage of their K12 education, but sustaining systems were missing. They also felt there were inconsistencies in policies and practices within the school. The counselor's view of the connection between MVV and school operation was the opposite of the teachers' perception. The counselor felt policies and practices were consistent and aligned with the school's MVV.

There was a desire to change the conversation within the school, to focus it more on hope and resilience rather than constantly bringing attention to student struggles. Many students became disconnected from school and teachers had to balance content and connection. This led to their frustration with the inconsistencies, as well as a belief students were also frustrated by

the inconsistencies. Beyond the frustration, however, was also the sense teachers were being asked to do so much that burnout has been the result.

  Regardless of the participants perception of the connection between daily operations and MVV, they all felt they, and the school, were serving students in the best ways they could, given the existing structures, resources, and outside forces.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of licensed staff about how a

school's mission, vision, and values aligned with the school's daily operation. This section of the

study will build connections between participants' responses to the research question, "How do

licensed staff perceive their school's mission, vision, and values are used to guide daily school

operations?" and the research literature.

Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

A key element in identifying how a school's MVV are implemented is first identifying

the MVV statements and then connecting elements of those statements to specific policies,

programs, or practices within the school. Table 2 provides a summary of the available statements

and where they are perceived as being present.

Table 2

Summary of Statement Use

Statement	Used or Referenced by		
	District/School Board	School	Counseling Center
District Mission Statement	X	X	X
School Mission Statement		X	
Counseling Mission Statement			X
District Vision Statement	X	X	
Counseling Vision Statement			X
Values Statement: *We are GREAT!*	X	X	X
District Belief Statements	X		
District Pillars	X		X

As Table 2 shows, there are a number of statements for school administrators to choose from as guiding forces for daily operations. Participants identified elements of all these statements as being present, in some way, in how the school and district operate. This presents issues in several ways.

Lack of Knowledge

When asked for the school's mission, vision, and values statements, the school administrator directed me to the district's website. However, when presenting these statements to participants, they identified a unique school mission statement, separate from the district's statement. That the administrator directed me to a different set of statements suggested they either did not know there was a school mission statement, or the school mission statement was not meant to be used in that way. If it is the former, it indicates the administrator perhaps is not familiar enough with the school's mission to be able to use it in guiding daily school operations; if it is the latter, then there may not be a clear understanding among staff about school's mission.

Watkins and McCaw (2006) and Gurley et al. (2014) both found that students in administrative programs did not know their school's mission, vision, or values statements. Without this knowledge, it would be difficult to bring staff together around a common and commonly understood goal, what Schmuck et al. (2012) describe as "getting everyone on the same page" (p.253). Doing so is the foundation of successful school improvement as well as building a school culture for student learning.

Fractured Focus

The literature suggests laser-like focus is the key to successfully using MVV to improve organizational outcomes (Drucker, 2008; Fullan, 2011; Schmuck et al., 2012) and avoid mission creep (Waite, 2010). In fact, when it comes to mission statements, Drucker (2008) and MacLeod

(2016) believe they should be clear and unambiguous. Drucker (2008) goes one step further and claims a mission statement should be no more than eight words and should "fit on a t-shirt" (p. 14). The mission statement found in Avery's classroom is 15 words long, the district mission statement is 17 words long, and the Counseling Center's mission statement is 26 words long. Taken together, these three statements promote eight separate objectives. Adding in vision, values, beliefs, and pillars, that number swells to 20 objectives. The School Improvement Plan provides even more objectives.

With so many objectives, where should a school administrator or staff member focus or not focus? Considering the size of the school's staff, without administrative direction there would be over 90 people independently choosing where they wanted to direct their energy, assuming they chose a focus from one of the available statements. With so many statements and ideas to choose from, attempting to implement them all would become an overwhelming task. To do so would require administrators and staff split their focus among multiple objectives. They would have shallow coverage of a large number of objectives instead of a deep focus on a few high-leverage objectives.

Shared Meaning

One of the hallmarks of a highly effective organization is not only strong and focused MVV statements, but staff-wide internalized, common understanding, and shared meaning of those statements (Anyamele, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2011; Schmuck et al., 2012). Even though some statements are shared between the school and district, the meaning ascribed to those statements may differ. When a single statement's use is shared by multiple levels, it is important to understand whether each level assigns the same meaning to the statement. This allows all

staff, from administrators to classified employees, to be working toward the same goal. The larger the organization, the more important this becomes.

Values. Daily practices—how people behave as they perform their jobs—are an organization's true values in action (Calder, 2011). While the counselor felt the staff and administration were working in concert and focused on the same goal, teachers disagreed. The teachers felt that with so many classroom teachers, the physical layout of the campus, and the inconsistencies between administration's words and action, there could be 80 different sets of values present. One of the critical factors in bringing an organization together toward a common goal is a shared and internalized understanding of the MVV and the expected behaviors (Anyamele, 2007; Calder, 2015; Calder 2018; Holosko et al., 2015; Lencioni, 2002; Schmuck et al., 2012). When staff has this understanding, it frees administrators to focus on aspects of their role that can only be addressed by leadership at the same time it empowers teachers and other staff members. This is possible because staff understands the overarching goals and values as well as the expected behaviors to achieve them.

Unfortunately, BHS is unable to achieve this sense of shared meaning since there is no understanding of the school's overarching goals or values based on its MVV statements. There are simply too many statements from which to choose.

Silos. Waite (2010) describes multiple organizational structures and how they present barriers to change. One such structure is a silo (Waite, 2010). A hierarchical structure is common in a silo-ed organization (Waite, 2010). In this structure, units within the larger organization are insulated from each other (Waite, 2010). Participants described this as "micro-cultures" or "little kingdoms." In this structure, innovation and improvement are difficult because these micro-cultures do not interact with each other. When Casey attempted to remedy this through staff

relationship-building exercises, administration did not allow more than one full session even though three were planned.

BHS is a large high school, and in total, licensed staff, including administrators, classroom teachers, TOSAs, counselors and other staff, exceeds 90 people. Given the size of the staff, groups being insulated from each other is not surprising. Participants noted there were staff members they did not know simply because they were in a different part of the school and there was no time specifically set aside for staff to interact and get to know each other. Further, the physical layout of the school campus, with multiple buildings, multiple sections within a building, and multiple hallways within a section, can further insulate departments. Add in the Main Office, Counseling, Student Management, and other independent or semi-independent departments or services, and the number of silos increases, further inhibiting school-wide cohesion.

District and School Motto: *We are GREAT!* The values adopted by the district, school, and community—being growth-oriented, responsible, educated, accepting, and trustworthy—are a good example on the importance of intentionality and understanding of shared meaning. The current meaning of the catchphrase no longer represents the values for which it stands. Instead, the slogan now means, "We're all in this together," a far cry from its initial meaning.

It is possible to make the argument that the new understanding is sufficient since it is shared by the district, school, and community. However, when interviewing the teachers, it was clear there are vestiges of the original meaning still happening within the school, such as with the *We are GREAT!* awards. They spoke of high-level policy decisions being made and the values being referenced to ensure policy and action matched.

With multiple meanings assigned to the same statement, it would be difficult to bring a large school staff, as well as district staff, to a common understanding and sense of shared meaning of what the statement represented, without intentional planning. How can school staff determine what actions represent the meaning of the statement when the meaning of the statement is in question? Moreover, and regardless of which meaning is chosen, unless and until there is consensus on what actions exemplify its meaning, it is incapable of being used as an effective guiding force within the school.

Potential Impact of Intentionally Implementing Mission, Vision, and Values

Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.

—W. E. Deming

Teacher participants expressed frustration, both for themselves and on behalf of students, about many current practices which are misaligned with components of effective organizations. Inconsistencies between claims about what is important and what follow-up is present, lack of communication, lack of staff cohesion, inconsistent or no ongoing training for initiatives administration claims are important—the presence of these elements are necessary for a highly effective organization (Anyamele, 2007; Calder, 2015; Calder, 2018; Fullan, 2011; Holosko et al., 2015).

Consistency

When the MVV are used to guide daily school operations, consistency most likely will be a natural by-product because every decision and expectation is filtered through these statements. (Calder, 2018; Schmuck et al., 2012). For example, if BHS were to review a curriculum for purchase and implementation, before BHS made the decision to purchase and implement the new

curriculum, the selection committee must first answer the following questions prior to moving forward with the purchase and implementation:

1) How does this curriculum meet our mission of inspiring a love of learning?

2) How does this curriculum move us toward our vision of fostering hope?

3) How does this curriculum embody our values?

Being forced to reckon with alignment would determine whether the curriculum is purchased and implemented. It could also determine how it is taught, what training is provided, and how implementation and instruction are evaluated. In other words, using such a framework for decision-making ensures that there must be an internalized common understanding and shared meaning for what is going to happen once this choice is made, which will likely lead to a consistent experience for staff and students. If any of these questions are unable to be answered, the decision becomes an automatic "no" because the proposed change would leave too much room for interpretation by individuals.

Using MVV provides another support for consistency—it directs attention and resources toward achieving the stated goals and living the stated values. Teachers were frustrated by the uneven implementation of school policies such as the CDL late-work policy, and the breakfast policy. Using MVV as a framework could help bring policy and expected behaviors into alignment, providing the foundation for administrative oversight.

Interactions

Using MVV to guide interactions between administration, staff, students, guardians, and other stakeholders could change the nature of how these interactions occur. It will likely provide a measure of transparency and consistency the teacher participants found missing in current daily operations. Additionally, using MVV could allow accountability conversations free from blame

and judgment by instead focusing them on a set of pre-determined goals and values. This is true regardless of which stakeholders are interacting.

Professional Development

Professional development is the foundation for teachers' improvement and growth in their practice (Anyamele, 2007; Calder, 2018; McClenny & Dare, 2013). When it is haphazard, as the teachers described, it may not support teachers' growth. In fact, participants indicated teachers had knowledge gaps about expectations or processes within the school and their best hope for figuring out something was to talk to other teachers. They also discussed trainings that were given once, sometimes years in the past, and teachers were expected to implement the training but were not provided follow-up or refresher trainings over time.

By using MVV as the guide for PD, teachers would have a clearer sense of what was expected of them in the classroom, they would be provided with an overarching PD plan for the year, and administrators would have a clear lens for evaluation and coaching. Furthermore, given the time allotted for PD throughout the year, the clear focus means the administrators would need to decide what the common focus would be for the year. An added benefit of this focus is to provide alignment between what administrators say is important and what happens within the school.

Cohesion and Buy-in

Staff cohesion and buy-in to the MVV are another essential element of an effective organization. None of the teacher participants were involved in the creation of the school or district MVV; the counselor was part of a collaborative team which developed the Counseling Center's mission and vision. When asked how staff buy-in was sought for the Counseling Center's mission and vision, they said buy-in was not sought. Instead, the mission and vision

were presented and then "accepted and embraced" by the staff. While this may work for a department where most of the school is not directly involved, as an overarching practice, this type of top-down directive is unlikely to promote staff buy-in and internalization of the MVV (Lencioni, 2002; Rosen, 2013). Having staff cohesion promotes consistency across classrooms and other departments within the school, which provides a basis for a consistent school culture instead of micro-cultures.

Full buy-in not only brings the staff together around a common goal, which promotes a "rally 'round the flag" effect, where staff come together and will often work beyond expectation to meet a goal, but it can ease the burden of leadership. When there is cohesion and buy-in, leadership can be distributed, and many issues normally addressed by the main office can be addressed by teachers. Because staff is acting in alignment with established and understood parameters, they also know they would likely have administrative support for their decisions. This type of distributed leadership promotes job satisfaction and improves job performance (Rosen, 2013; Schmuck et al., 2012), which is likely to be beneficial for students.

School Improvement Planning

Development of the SIP would also be impacted by using MVV as a guiding force. Instead of a consistent focus on quantitatively measurable data, using MVV would necessitate a focus on the intangibles. Though challenging at first—what does "love of learning" look like—incorporating these ideas into the SIP process means they would take a prominent position in school operations, PD, evaluation, and interactions. It would also mean students need to understand what these elements looked like and how they were being implemented in the classroom and throughout the school.

The Role of Leadership

The role of leadership in promoting and implementing the MVV cannot be overstated. Leaders are at the center of implementing a school culture based on its MVV and are responsible for setting direction and modeling the behaviors necessary to achieve the MVV (Calder, 2006; Kelley & Salisbury, 2013; Pekarsky, 2007). Without effective leadership, there is unlikely to be a shift in school culture or school-wide academic improvement.

Modeling

Modeling is an essential element of school change (Fullan, 2011). The lack of modeling, especially when it came to the intangibles, was mentioned by the teacher participants. Not only did it send the message that what administrators claimed was important was not important, it also meant there was no follow-up or follow-through. In other words, no one was checking to see if certain behaviors were being implemented. Furthermore, leaders modeling behaviors helps to demonstrate for staff and students what is expected of them, which helps reduce confusion, and helps bring staff together and get them "all on the same page" (Schmuck et al., 2012, p. 253).

Creating Mission, Vision, and Values

Fullan (2011) states, "Doing is the crucible of change" (p. 3). This means another role of leadership is to move their staff out of the theorizing stage and into action (Fullan, 2011). Using the MVV as a guiding force provides leverage to take this step. One place these action steps can be developed is during the SIP process, when the upcoming year's direction for the school is set. This would also allow leaders to develop an overarching PD plan instead of the last-minute fill-ins described by the teachers, bringing further alignment throughout the school.

There is some debate about whether a leader should develop and deliver the MVV to the school (Anyamele, 2007; Cho et al., 2019), or whether it should be a collaborative effort

(Lencioni, 2002; Rosen, 2013). The general consensus within organization development literature is that the effort should be collaborative. Such an effort is more likely to result in the staff buy-in needed for effective implementation of MVV.

With a school the size of BHS, it would be unwieldy to have a staff-wide collaborative effort. In fact, Schmuck et al. (2012) claims a group of eight people or fewer is the most effective workgroup size. To manage this in a way that includes the widest variety of stakeholders, school leadership would be responsible for assembling a group of downstream leaders, such as department leaders, student leaders, and parent leaders.

Evaluation of Implementation

Once an MVV is created, it must be implemented. Teachers found this to be an area for growth within the school. They noted administration claimed specific intangibles were important, yet their evaluation focus was on quantitative data. There was also no follow-up, and the intangibles teachers were told to focus on were not what was being evaluated in the classroom.

Once MVV is implemented on a school-wide level, and expectations are set and modeled, leadership becomes responsible for ensuring MVV is being enacted at every level. It should also become the basis for teacher evaluation and coaching (Sommers, 2009). Not only would this show administration truly believes the MVV to be important, but it can support sufficient time, feedback, and training to help improve how these things manifest throughout the school.

Impact on Students

Perhaps the most important impact from implementing MVV as a guiding framework is the impact on students. When asked, teachers believed the consistency provided by using MVV

as a guiding force would positively impact student experience at school. There was the sense it would make students feel more connected because teachers would be given time and expected to focus on relationship-building, inspiring hope and resilience, and helping students live the values represented by *We are GREAT!* This shift, teachers believed, would improve the quantitative measures such as attendance and grades. Further, the teachers felt this change in structure would fundamentally change the conversation within school—away from what students are doing wrong to what they are doing right—and allow them to support students in their personal growth as well as their academic growth.

Even more than changing how teachers interacted with students, using MVV throughout the school means students must fully understand the MVV and what behaviors were expected from them. In situations such as the CDL late-work policy, this would mean students would need to take ownership of their organization and time management since all teachers would be consistent in implementing policies aligned with MVV and would be enforcing the policy equally. In turn, conversations with students who violated the policy would not be about the student as a person, but about the behavior and how it did or did not align with the MVV and expected behaviors that went along with that alignment. Overall, teachers felt aligning practices with MVV would create a culture where students felt connected to school, have increased learning, and grew as people.

The Counselor

Throughout the interview with the counselor, they reiterated several times that the school was already being managed in alignment with the MVV. They often referred to "hope" being the core of actions and policy decisions made administrators, even though it was not specifically the school's mission, nor had the counselor heard of the mission statement Peyton recalled as being

different from the district's mission statement—the one on the poster in Avery's classroom. This contrasted sharply with teachers' perceptions of how the MVV were being used throughout the school.

I was initially surprised by this disconnect between experiences. As I thought about it more, however, I felt that the differing roles within the school likely influenced how participants experienced school management. The counselor had better access to administration and a different context for interacting with students—seeing them one-on-one rather than in large groups. Also, the counselor was not responsible for delivering content in addition to providing social-emotional supports.

This difference highlights the need for school-wide understanding and internalization of the MVV. Without such an understanding and internalization, staff members are unlikely to understand each other's perspectives and experiences. The process of gaining staff buy-in and implementing MVV throughout the school could bring cohesion and a common sense of purpose among all school staff.

Conclusion

Throughout the study, it was clear the participants' focus was on creating a better school environment for students. Even though much of what they said might register as complaints to some, my observation is that the participants' feelings emerged from a desire to improve the school experience for students. I heard teachers both acknowledge the difficulties faced by administrators, while at the same time there was the sense they were resigned to them remaining unresolved. Despite the lack of cohesive policy that was consistently implemented, evaluated, and supported, participants still felt administration was doing the best they could with the tools and resources available to them.

When asked how they felt implementing MVV could change the school, their focus was on the positive impact it would have on students. Even though research has shown implementing MVV would also have a positive impact on their work experience, participants kept students at the center of their minds. Overall, the participants were focused on the student experience and saw improving school operations to improve student connection to school, inspire hope, and build relationships as the pathways to increased student achievement.

Implications for Practice

This study's findings suggest there are areas where education leadership practices can use MVV to create more consistent, supportive, and aligned environments within their schools. Such environments have been shown to increase job satisfaction of staff, ease the leadership burden on administrators, and improve outcomes for students. Education leaders have an enormous responsibility, not only to their staff, but to students, families, and the community at large. With such responsibility, education leaders need tools and resources that can help them create a consistent, positive school experience.

The use of MVV as a tool is shown to have a large impact on organizations when it comes to improving outcomes and creating a healthy culture. Unfortunately, as Gurley et al. (2014) and Watkins and McCaw (2008) found, most administrative programs do not adequately prepare education leaders to use MVV as a tool. In fact, collegiate education leadership programs provide little, if any, training on MVV as a resource for guiding a school (Gurley et al., 2012).

The first step in implementing MVV would be to first identify and/or create useable MVV statements, narrowing down to three concise, actionable statements. From there, education leaders can identify the specific behaviors that are expected as part of the MVV implementation. These behaviors can then be supported through PD and evaluation practices. Once education

leaders make the choice to implement MVV, they can align decisions at every level and within every program of the school.

An additional benefit of implementing MVV is that it can ease the burden of leadership by distributing it among the staff, a practice which can create a sense of empowerment and support (Rosen, 2013). Once there is a commonly understood and internalized shared meaning for the MVV, teachers and other staff are empowered to act within their sphere of influence (Schmuck et al., 2012), and administration can support those choices since they would be made in alignment with the MVV. This is empowering to teachers because it means they are trusted by their leaders. In addition, students will likely receive a consistent experience and consistent expectations across classrooms and other areas of the school.

Fullan (2011) states, "Doing is the crucible of change" (p. 3) and that it is impossible for organization members to think their way into effective change. Instead, they must act their way into effective change (Fullan, 2011). When school leaders implement MVV, of necessity they must model and monitor the behaviors they wish to see within the school. This includes not only acting out the behaviors themselves, but also ensuring others are implementing the agreed-upon behaviors. Taking this approach can help teachers, students, and other stakeholders see a connection between words and actions, and know they are truly expected to value and implement these changes. In other words, what gets measured gets managed.

Implementing MVV can also help with crisis management. Though crisis management, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are beyond the scope of this research, it is nearly impossible to discuss education leadership in 2021 without acknowledging the disruption a crisis can cause to school operation. MVV is a way to ease a crisis transition because it provides a solid foundation upon which to make decisions (Jackson, 2002; Rosen, 2013; Schmuck et al.,

2012). Choices about school operation would still filter through the MVV statements, even though they are applied to a new context. The use of MVV as a leadership tool during a crisis can provide a measure of consistency which may reduce anxiety associated with abrupt change (Jackson, 2002; Rosen, 2013; Schmuck et al., 2012).

Overall, education leaders would well serve their school communities by taking the time to learn how to use MVV as a guiding force within their school, and then taking the steps to implement it.

Future Research

This study was designed to examine licensed staff perceptions of the use of mission, vision, and values as it related to daily school operations. Current empirical research is limited and there is a large focus on the impact of MVV at organization and education administration levels. I envision four potential areas of future study that would shed light on how MVV can improve the experience of all stakeholders within their schools.

First, ask the teachers. One of the many areas neglected by the current research is the perception of teachers in how MVV is used in their school and how it impacts their work experience. This is not surprising since few administrative programs specifically focus on the use of MVV to guide school operations and, therefore, it is likely few administrators would intentionally and explicitly use MVV as a basis for their decision-making. Additionally, it is unlikely teachers are often asked to consider how their school MVV manifests in the day-to-day operations of their school.

A second area of future research would be to expand into elementary and middle-school levels to see if teacher experiences are the same. It is possible the nature of high school provides a very different experience for teachers due the content specialization, size, age of students, or

other factors. This study demonstrated that teachers, who are often considered boots-on-the-ground when it comes to influence and impact with students, may have very different experiences than those in the main office or other areas of the school. Since teachers have the most contact with students throughout their academic careers, it is important to understand their experiences. Future research focused on teacher experiences can shed light on similarities and differences across K12 schools at all levels.

A third potential area of future research would be studies comparing administrative perceptions and teacher perception of the use of MVV to guide daily school operations. Studies such as these could shed light on any tension that may exist between differing levels of responsibility within the school and how they perceive MVV is being implemented.

Finally, a fourth area for study would be to have school leadership implement MVV as a guiding force and examine the difference in experience for administrators, teachers, students, and the school community at the beginning and end of the study.

Concluding Thoughts

By most modern measures, BHS is a high-functioning school. Teachers who participated in the study generally seemed happy to work there, the counselor felt the school served students at a high level, the administration was respected by participants, and students were at the center of participants' concerns. At the same time, there are areas that could benefit from applying an organization development lens to daily operations. The easiest way for administrators to do this is to implement MVV as a guiding force within the school. Implementing MVV as a guiding force could have several benefits to administrators, teachers, other staff, and students and their parents/guardians, which could make their experience within the school more positive and productive. Moreover, the implementation of MVV as a guiding force could bring school

practices into alignment with stated goals and values, further adding to a positive school

experience.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Questions for Participants

At the beginning of the focus group meeting, participating teachers were given copies of the district's mission, vision, and values statements, and asked to read them. Participants identified additional mission and vision statements. Participants had statements available throughout the interviews. Participants were encouraged to ask clarifying questions, and I answered in a way that strove to avoid bias in the results.

Introductions

1. Please introduce yourself.

   a. What is your name?

   b. What do you teach?

   c. How long have you been teaching?

   d. How long have you worked at this school?

Knowledge of School Mission, Vision and Value Statements

Site eligibility for selection was based on the existence of at least two of the following: mission statement, vision statement, or values statement. If the selected school did not have one of these statements, questions related to that statement will be skipped.

2. Were you involved in writing the school's mission statement?

   a. If yes,

      i. Will you describe the process?

      ii. Was staff agreement sought? If so, how? If not, do you know why not?

   b. If no, do you know who wrote it and when?

3. Were you involved in writing the school's vision statement?

a. If yes,

    i. Will you describe the process?

    ii. Was staff agreement sought? If so, how? If not, do you know why not?

b. If no, do you know who wrote it and when?

4. Were you involved in writing the school's values statement?

a. If yes,

    i. Will you describe the process?

    ii. Was staff agreement sought? If so, how? If not, do you know why not?

b. If no, do you know who wrote it and when?

5. How often does the building administrator reference the school's mission, vision, or values statements? If they do, when and how do they reference these statements?

Perceptions of the use of Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

This portion of the discussion began with the general research question: What are your perceptions of how the school's mission, vision, and values are used to guide daily school operations?

The format of the interviews was semi-structured and the questions below were used to ensure salient information was gathered if it was not uncovered organically. The intent of this portion of the focus group discussion was to allow the discussion to evolve naturally and the questions below were only specifically used if the questions were not answered during open discussion.

6. Mission statements

a. In what ways do you feel the school's mission statement is/is not being used to guide school operations?

b. If it is not currently being used or could be used more, how do you think using it would affect the school?

7.   Vision statements

    a. In what ways do you feel the school's vision statement is/is not being to guide school operations?

    b. If it is not currently being used or could be used more, how do you think using it would affect the school?

8. Values statements

    a. In what ways do you feel the school's values statement is/is not being used to guide school operations?

    b. If it is not currently being used or could be used more, how do you think using it would affect the school?

9. Teacher perception

    a. If teachers see the mission, vision and values statements being used to guide school operations: How do you feel these impact your daily experience within the school?

    b. If teachers do not see the mission, vision, and values statements being used, or only sometimes being used to guide school operations: How do you feel your experience within the school would change with the use of mission, vision, and values statements guiding how the school is run?

Participants were asked for any final thoughts and thanked for their participation.

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

Licensed Educator Perceptions on the use of Mission, Vision, and Values to Guide Daily
School Operations: A Qualitative Research Study

Dear Educator,

My name is Adaline Fraser and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox
University in Newberg, Oregon. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research
and have chosen to examine teacher perceptions regarding the use of a school's mission, vision,
and values as it relates to the daily operation of the school. Please carefully read this consent
form, ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this
research study. The school principal has given permission for you to participate in this study.
You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this
research.

You are invited to participate in a focus group regarding your experiences as a teacher. The focus
group will be conducted via Zoom. Your participation is voluntary. It is anticipated this focus
group will take 60-90 minutes to complete and there is no financial compensation for your
participation. The questions relate to how you perceive the school's mission, vision, and values
statements are used to guide the school's daily operations. I hope the findings from this focus
group survey will reveal your perceptions of how the use or non-use school's mission, vision,
and values statements may affect your experience within the school.

Possible risks from participation in this research are minimal. There may be some discomfort
related to the nature of a focus group and lack of anonymity within the group. If you choose to
participate in the focus group, you agree to hold all information in confidence and not report
outside the group. The results of this study will be used for research purposes which may include
presentations at professional conferences, presentations to school administrators and teachers,
and/or academic publications.

Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. Data will be reported with no
identifying characteristics and pseudonyms will be used in data reporting. All research materials
(i.e., focus group recording, transcripts and signed consent forms) will be maintained in a secure
location for a period of three years. I will be the only individual with access to these materials.
After this time, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete responses.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this project. If you have any questions regarding this
research, please contact me at (503) 266-3604 or afraser19@georgefox.edu, or my advisor at
George Fox University, Dr. Linda Samek, and (503) 554-2866 or lsamek@goergefox.edu.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please read the authorization
and sign below.

Authorization: I have read and understand this consent form and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state or local laws.

Participant Name (printed): _____ Date: _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____