



Schoolyear 2000

Subsystem 1: Mission Definition

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Rationale

The past fifty years have brought clearly into focus the critical necessity of having formal organizational missions. For major accomplishments, it is essential to have the mission communicated to and shared by those who are charged to achieve it. Consensus on organizational mission is a necessary condition of success. The educational system can learn much from the other sectors of society about how to design, develop, and achieve a specific mission. It is clear that no organization can accomplish all missions. Therefore, it is essential to decide what can be accomplished within the competence bases in the organization. Finally, those objectives and purposes not explicitly included in the mission are implicitly excluded.

To realize a consensus mission in any organization is a continuing process. Mission definition is, in many respects to education, what the marketing (not sales) and strategic planning functions are to industry. It is keeping in close contact with constituents (e.g., customers) to learn of their needs and wants, and identifying which of those needs and wants that the education sector should serve.

The process of mission definition starts with general goals by imagining alternative futures, then selecting those most appropriate for the organization. When these general goals are identified, selected, and assigned priorities, indicators and measures of them are developed. Developing valid measures of goals is a technically difficult task.

Outcome-based measures, such as those intended to measure societal impact, have ranged from impressions or feelings, to estimates of economic and social indicators, to more specific ones such as the proportion of students who are fully qualified to pursue higher levels of education.

Cultural transmission measures, such as those concerned with the breadth and depth of subject matter learned have also been used. For example, mastery of bodies of knowledge, like chemistry or psychology, has been used as an indicator of educational mission accomplishment. Measures of the breadth and depth of subject matter knowledge are technically much easier to define. Measures of

processes and skills, such as interpersonal relations, appreciation of the arts, and personal development have also been used.

It may be necessary to make trade-offs among the societal impact measures that treat principally economic issues, and cultural transmission measures that address the advancement of knowledge and culture. These goals are not necessarily independent or antithetical. To advocate that only societal impact goals be used could be shortsighted, particularly in light of the primitive measures of societal impact currently available. Furthermore, while measuring societal impact is difficult, establishing attributable relationships between educational outputs and outcomes requires even larger inferential leaps.

Since Florida schools are locally funded and controlled, it makes good sense to have a highly systematic and permanent process of deliberate citizen involvement. Citizen involvement means citizen support. Proper mission definition at the district level refers to fitting the curriculum to the future needs of each community, without, at the same time, sacrificing the opportunities of individual students. For example, districts that are principally agricultural may have different mission objectives than urban districts. However, Florida students should be prepared to function in either environment.

One approach to continuing citizen involvement is the appointment of several standing committees each charged with a specific aspect of planning and communication. The committees would have two distinct functions: to provide input to the administration, and, to develop community support for schooling requirements. If fundamentally new models are going to be introduced, they must be planned to succeed. This success probably cannot be achieved without a priori planning by informed community leaders.

Problem-Solution Alignment

One major problem faced by schools is that through time, many different groups have exerted influence over the curriculum, methods of instruction, discipline policy, time of operations, calendar, methods of grading, and numerous other professional and quasi-professional issues. Understandably, educators have reacted to these power influences defensively. In a sense, they have discovered how the potential damage can be limited and have operated as best they could under those conditions. As exacerbated by social, racial, and ethnic overtones, this conflict is often reflected in antisocial behavior among the students within the schools.

At the same time, educators have also adopted an attitude that they were professionals and really knew best how to conduct the schools. Citizens have come to challenge the omniscience claimed by educators because of the system's inability to meet individual and society's needs for knowledge. Thus, there is a continuing low-level conflict between educators and their constituents.

Mission Definition consists of both strategic and tactical planning. The intention of the Mission Definition Subsystem is to change from a posture of reaction to one of pro-action. The creation of mechanisms that establish methods and procedures for positive citizen involvement have the potential for changing the

arenas of conflict in the community from public hearings on controversial topics to planned action taken by responsible citizens to anticipate and avoid disruptive actions.

It is the specific intent of Mission Definition to concentrate resources on priority objectives and to minimize conflict through planning and organized citizen involvement.

Subsystem Definition

The Mission Definition Subsystem has three principal functions:

1. To design the methods and procedures to be used on a continuing basis to specify the mission of each organization at state, district, and school levels. (Design stage)
2. To employ these methods and procedures on a continuing basis to achieve a consensus mission for the organization at each level. (Development stage)
3. To establish a standing community support organization at each level to keep the organizational missions relevant and at the forefront of public support and attention. (Operations stage)

Inputs

The inputs to Mission Definition will consist of the following:

- Legislative mandates. The annual requirements that the legislature or State Board of Education specify that each organizational level must address.
- The mandates, policies, and requirements of the Department of Education, either for its own operations, the operations of districts, or individual schools.
- All financial resources available
- The requirements and mandates of the Federal Government

Outputs

The outputs from the Mission Definition function include:

- The consensus-based mission statement and supporting rationale at state, district, and school levels.
- Mission objectives and rationale for each organizational level and unit.

General Concerns

Mission Definition is both a political and technical procedure. All stakeholders in the community must be included in the processes that arrive at the mission. A forum must be provided in which alternate views can be considered.

The process of Mission Definition should be to orchestrate input so that decisions about how to accomplish the mission are made at the most appropriate level and include participation of the necessary individuals. For example, parents should participate in the decision about what should be offered in the schools. They should have minimum influence over how the instruction is provided. Each special interest group will want to insert its view of truth in the curriculum. However, the separation of mission from curriculum and the establishment of citizen review committees should minimize the disruption from the likes of the Flat Earth Society.

Processes

There are three principal processes used in Mission Definition.

- The analytic processes necessary to identify and interpret all input requirements and constraints from local, state, and federal sources.
- Organizational processes to form standing committees of citizens to serve the mission.
- Consensus building processes that allow the leaders to obtain input from the legitimate stakeholders and form that input into clear statements of mission and mission objectives.

Analytic processes

In the design stage, specifications will be written to define the initial range of issues to be considered by the analysis process. Analyze legislation, policies, funding formulas and procedures and other inputs that will have an impact on the mission. This process identifies the true constraints and separates them from the perceived constraints. It translates legislation, funding, and other areas of confusion into requirements that must be addressed in mission definition. The analysis process implies that technical and professional services are available to each organizational level.

Organizational processes

These should be designed so that there is a correspondence among all organizational levels. Mission definition at the state, district, and school level should be well aligned. In the design stage, specifications for organizations will be established to insure that all significant elements at the community level will be addressed. Communications links should be included in the design.

One approach would be to appoint or elect standing committees within the community that are organized to treat a specific issue. One issue might be economic development. What economic future should the community have and how would education contribute to achieving that future. A second issue may be recreation. What forms of recreational and vocational activities should be involved in the community? What does education contribute to those activities? Other committees could address physical plant and alternate facilities, social problems, and school-community governance.

Consensus building

In the design stage, numerous consensus-building models will be considered and recommendations will be made on the most promising approaches and procedures. Because consensus building is such a critical element of success, a substantial effort should be mounted to identify the best approaches.

Consensus building is both a political and technical process. The technical processes refer to discovering, by adaptation from elsewhere or by invention, methods that will operate efficiently over a period of time. This is a continuous process requiring nurturing and attention. Once the technical processes are available, the political process begins.

Personnel and Staffing

At the state level, the technical functions are primarily analysis and communications. Mission Definition should be a staff function established at a high level within the DOE. This staff should include legislative and policy analysts, educational systems designers, economists and budget analysts.

At the district level, these same functions are required. However, much of the initial work could be contracted to temporary consultants. The continuing function will require the efforts of district staff skilled in consensus management and who can orchestrate the standing committees of citizens.

At the school level, the mission definition function can be accomplished through the use of temporary consultants initially, then through the regular operating activities of the governance structure adopted, including both parents and school staff. At the school level, the primary focus will be on deciding how best to accomplish the mission within the resource base available. Mission objectives are not decided at the school level. The school will have had prior input to the mission definition function; their ideas will have been well represented in the consensus process.