Surveying the future: an innovative tool for expressing stakeholder vision as demonstrated in Lawrence Township public schools

Jessica Reynolds Haviland
Rowan University

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SURVEYING THE FUTURE:
AN INNOVATIVE TOOL FOR EXPRESSING STAKEHOLDER VISION
AS DEMONSTRATED IN LAWRENCE TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by
Jessica Reynolds Haviland

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 31, 2002

Approved by
Professor

Date Approved 6-1-02
ABSTRACT

Jessica Reynolds Haviland

Surveying the Future:
An Innovative Tool for Expressing Stakeholder Vision
as Demonstrated in Lawrence Township Public Schools

2002
Advisor: M. Larry Litwin
Master of Arts, Public Relations

The purpose of this study is to create a survey instrument that will allow all stakeholders in a school district to share their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes regarding their vision for the future. The results of this survey will be used to create a vision statement to clarify goals, prioritize activities, and unify stakeholders in the pursuit of a desired future. This survey can serve as a benchmark, against which a school district can measure progress toward its goals. The survey instrument will also be a template, which can be used by other organizations to assess their publics’ vision for the future.

This study builds on previous research by incorporating the suggestions of education, planning, and management experts in the creation of a new survey instrument. This instrument was utilized to assess the vision of stakeholders in the Lawrence Township School District in Lawrence Township, NJ.

The survey revealed key attitudes and opinions of Lawrence Township stakeholders, which were incorporated into a sample vision statement for Lawrence Township Public Schools.
MINI-ABSTRACT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to

M. Larry Litwin, Constance Reynolds, and Mark Haviland

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Chapter I

Reasons for Study

*Vision without action is merely a dream;*
*Action without vision just passes the time;*
*Vision with action can change the world.*
- Joel Arthur Barker

Across the country, educators face increased pressure from the influx of new technology, changing teaching methods, and limited funding and resources. In addition to these new demands, administrators face the recurring difficulties of coordinating programs, motivating teachers and students, and planning curricula. Educators continually seek effective solutions that can address modern challenges and “meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations and complexities associated with the social, economic, and moral demands that society places on our system of public education,” (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p.1).

In response to these challenges, DuFour explains that educators are often “bombarded with conflicting images, ideas, and alternatives for improving schools,” (1997, p.1). The greatest difficulty lies in deciding which, if any, of the latest trends, solutions, and strategies will enable meaningful change to take place.

Increasingly, educators address these problems using planning strategies borrowed from the corporate world. One important aspect of strategic planning that has been adopted by many school districts is the use of vision statements. A vision statement describes an organization’s ideal future state. A clearly articulated vision helps to clarify goals, prioritize activities, and unify stakeholders in the pursuit of a desired future.
Developing a vision statement allows school administrators to reverse the tendency for schools to focus on educational inputs rather than outputs. The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools' *School Guide for Planning* explains this advantage:

Too often schools find themselves working on curriculum and instructional materials and engaging in staff development before they have clearly decided what students should know, how they should use their content knowledge, process skills, and work habits, and what the quality of their performance should be (Nicklas, De Lucia, & Evans, 2001, p. ii).

Articulating a vision statement focuses activity on these priority issues and outcomes while building a sense of teamwork and responsibility. Peterson explains how this promotes successful teaching and learning:

Schools are more successful when leaders work with staff and the community to build a collective educational vision that is clear, compelling, and connected to teaching and learning. This collective vision helps focus attention on what is important, motivates staff and students, and increases the sense of shared responsibility for student learning (Peterson, 1995).

**Reasons for Study**

At this time, considerable research has been done on the effectiveness of vision statements as planning tools in both business and education. However, there has not been a significant amount of research on cost-effective and time-efficient methods for creating vision statements. Most often, vision statements are the products of retreats or workshops involving only the leaders of an organization (Brown, 1998). Another common method for developing vision statements involves conducting focus group discussions with small numbers of community members (Senge, 2000). While allowing organizational leaders to create a vision statement might be time-efficient, it does not incorporate the community input.
necessary to create a shared vision. Focus groups allow community representatives to share
in the creation a vision statement, but only after undergoing a highly expensive and time-
consuming process. Additionally, since focus groups involve only a small number of people,
the resulting data cannot be generalized to the entire population (S. Carroll & D. Carroll,
2001).

The purpose of this study is to create a survey instrument that will allow all
stakeholders in a school district to share their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes regarding their
vision for the future. This will be done in a manner that is efficient in terms of both cost and
time and that is based on scientific research techniques. This survey will also serve as a
benchmark, against which a school district can measure progress toward its goals. The
survey instrument will also be a template, which could be used by other organizations to
assess their publics' vision for the future.

Theoretical Framework

At its most basic, the term “vision” refers to the act of seeing. Most people have
personal visions, which allows them to “see” or articulate their goals, as well as motivating
and inspiring them to achieve those goals (Kolzow, 1999). Similarly, an organizational
vision answers the question “what do we want to create?” (Senge, 1990, p.206) and unifies
each stakeholder with shared aspirations for a desired future.

A vision is unable to motivate and unify the members of an organization unless it is
shared. Kolzow (1999) explains that a shared vision will create a common identity and a
platform of understanding for all individuals involved. A shared vision also creates
motivation and unifies all stakeholders with a sense of ownership and responsibility for
helping the organization achieve its goals. An effective vision statement must emanate from
the personal visions, values and priorities of the organization as a whole.

Senge (1990) underscores the importance of collaboration in building a shared vision. If individuals feel that an organizational vision does not reflect their values or goals, they will either reject or silently comply with the vision. In either case, they will not actively participate in the creation of the desired reality the vision represents. A compliant individual will accept a vision. A committed individual will enthusiastically embrace the vision and will feel personally responsible for helping to achieve it. Only with the commitment of all of its stakeholders will an organization’s vision become a reality.

**Delimitations of Study**

Lawrence Township Public Schools (LTPS), located in central New Jersey, is currently seeking accreditation by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. As part of the accreditation process, LTPS has decided to create a vision statement for the school district. The research instrument created in this study will be used to survey five key stakeholder groups identified by LTPS. These groups include: current LTPS faculty and staff, parents of current LTPS students, LTPS students in grades 7-12, LTPS graduates, and Lawrence Township community members.

A probability study will be conducted in which each participant will be asked to respond to both open and closed questions regarding their vision for the future of LTPS. The results of the survey will then be analyzed using a statistical analysis software program.
Definitions

**Stakeholder:** a person having a stake or interest in the success of an enterprise, business, movement, etc. (Agnes, 2001, p.1394).

**Vision:** the act or power of seeing with the eye; a mental image, the ability to perceive something not actually visible, as through mental acuteness or keen foresight; force or power of imagination (Agnes, 2001, p. 1598).

**Vision Statement:** describes an organization's ideal future state; helps to clarify goals, prioritize activities, and unify stakeholders in the pursuit of a desired future.
Chapter II

Related Research

In both the corporate and education fields, ideas abound regarding the definition, development, use, and significance of vision statements. Most concepts of vision refer to the process of creation and direction towards an ideal future that is grounded in the values and priorities of an organization.

Noted management author Senge writes that a vision answers the question "What do we want to create?" (1990, p.206). In summarizing the collected works of many leadership authors, Yair states that a vision is "an image of the future, in that it provides direction to be pursued. Visions also clarify a set of ideas, articulate a sense of purpose, and highlight the uniqueness of an organization" (2001, p 2). Bennis and Nanus explain, "The critical point is that a vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists" (1996, p 89).

Although leaders often articulate visions, effective visions encompass values and priorities that are important to all stakeholders in an organization. Conger and Kanungo define vision as "a set of idealized goals established by the leader that represent a perspective shared by the followers" (1998, p 156). The concepts of collaboration and sharing are integral in developing a vision statement.

Most Important Previous Work: The Basis of Vision Research

The use of vision statements to unify stakeholders and prioritize organizational improvements is based on the systemic view of organizations. Systems theory views an
organization as a living organism. “When you look at a school, or a school district from this perspective, you see a ‘whole’ system with deeply interconnected sub-systems,” (“Change Requires an Understanding of How Systems Work”, 1996, p.1). In viewing a school district as a system, each of the stakeholder groups identified in this study operate as sub-systems. As previously identified, the stakeholder sub-systems targeted in this study include: faculty and staff, current students, parents, recent graduates, and community residents.

Systems thinking also facilitates the identification of organizational patterns and structures that lie beneath a school district’s diverse problems and the attempts made to solve them. These patterns and structures are also referred to as an organization’s culture. A school district’s culture encompasses the “guiding beliefs and expectations evident in the way a school operates, particularly in reference to how people relate (or fail to relate) to each other” (“Vision Statement”, 2001).

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) concluded that school culture plays an integral part in all improvement efforts. In Standards On Professional Development, the NSDC states: “A school’s culture will either help or hinder the process of instructional change,” (as quoted by Du Four, 1997, p.2). Unfortunately, a negative school culture can act as an invisible roadblock, sabotaging proposed solutions and nullifying improvement efforts. Alternatively, a positive school culture can encourage, support, and enhance reform efforts.

By their very nature, systems are often resistant to piecemeal changes, which often target programs and activities, rather than patterns and structures. As Senge points out, “unless a system is changed, it will continue to create the same results” (Isaacson & Bamburg, 1992, p.1). Unfortunately, many school improvement and reform plans focus primarily on programmatic tactics, rather than targeting the system as a whole.
However, vision statements provide a unique tool for schools as systems because they address the fundamental culture of an organization. As members of each organizational sub-system begin to share a vision for the future, the overall culture of the organization will come to support and enhance meaningful change.

In his book *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Senge introduced the concept of the learning organization. Based on systems theory, a learning organization is “an organization in which people at all levels are, collectively, continually enhancing their capacity to create things they really want to create” (O’Neil, 1995, p.1). Shared vision is one of the five disciplines described in Senge’s book and is said to be the heart of a learning organization (Isaacson and Bamburg, 1992).

Many educators have adopted Senge’s view of learning organizations and emphasis on shared vision. In her keynote address at the 1995 conference of the National Staff Development Council, Milbrey McLaughlin stated that building learning communities offers “the most powerful opportunity for reform...we are closer to ‘the truth’ than ever before” (as quoted by DuFour, 1997, p.1).

Although many individuals and organizations in the fields of business and education agree that vision statements are important planning tools, there is widespread confusion regarding the differences between vision, mission, and goal statements. While many individuals use these terms interchangeably, several key differences can be observed. As previously discussed, a vision is an image of a desired future. An effective vision statement reflects the values and hopes shared by an organization’s stakeholders. Thus, a vision statement is future-focused and “defines what you want to become in the next three to ten years” (Brown, 1998, p.18).
By definition, a mission statement focuses on an organization’s mission or purpose. School mission statements often define what the school is trying to accomplish and can be developed from the vision itself (Peterson, 1995). Goals are used to transition an organization from its real to ideal states, forming a roadmap to guide improvement efforts (“Vision Statement”, 2001). While a vision statement concentrates on the future, a strategic plan provides the intermediary steps necessary to make the vision a reality. Problems can arise when an organization seeks to act based solely on a vision statement without addressing the priority issues, goals, objectives, and creative problem-solving skills, which are identified in a strategic plan (Kolzow, 1999).

**Relationship of Study to Previous Work: Existing Guidelines and Formats for Creating Vision Statements**

In addition to the previously discussed need for stakeholder collaboration, research provides several important guidelines that are useful in creating a vision statement. According to the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, school visions should include the following components:

A vision features a compelling picture or image of what the school can become in the future, a vision is feasible and attainable, a vision is connected to and articulates deeper values and hopes for the future, a vision needs to be translated into actions and plans that can be and are implemented (Peterson, 1995).

In *Total Quality Management*, Slade and Tomlinson discuss four aspects of effective vision statements (1997). These include clearly describing aims that are measurable and tangible, setting a non-negotiable end-date that presents a reasonable degree of challenge (usually three to five years from the present), fostering real ownership and commitment to the vision, and insuring that both the vision and end-date are realistic and achievable.
Research also suggests that vision statements emphasize student learning. This focus is maintained by visions that “emphasize higher-order thinking, problem solving, and other features of high-achieving learning environments” (Peterson, 1995).

According to the Middle Level Leadership Center (MLLC) at the University of Missouri (2001), vision statements must be future-oriented yet “consistent with the current status of the organization as well as important educational and societal trends.” The MLLC (2001) also observes that a vision statement should not be limited by the availability of resources, but rather assume that these will be secured. Kolzow (1999) observed that a vision statement must be appropriate for the organization and should comply with its history, culture, and values. School vision statements must also be clearly and concisely written, avoiding jargon and empty slogans that may be confusing to individuals outside the education profession.

Existing research also outlines several content areas that should be addressed by all stakeholders during the visioning process. In the article “The Stages of Systematic Change” (1993), Anderson lists three areas that should be addressed when creating a school vision statement. These areas include student outcomes, system structure, and underlying beliefs. Hirsh makes reference to six other areas that should be addressed in a school vision statement in her article “Seeing and Creating the Future” (1996). These include facility, curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff, and community. All of these significant guidelines for writing a vision statement have been summarized in an easy-to-use Guidelines Checklist, found in Appendix A.

Vision statements are written in many different formats. The Technology Planning Guide (2002) outlines several formats that are often used. Although these examples deal
specifically with a school’s vision for the use of technology, they could be easily adapted into an overall vision statement.

For example, some schools have briefly described a typical day for an imaginary student in this desired learning environment. Another approach is to reflect on how a graduate of the school/district with technology integration will be better equipped to meet the challenges of the future. A third way to make the vision statement come alive is to include examples of students and educators using technology in practical and engaging ways (The Technology Planning Guide, 2002, p.3).

Although effective vision statements can incorporate any of these formats, it is important to include each of the features outlined in the Guidelines Checklist found in Appendix A. This is easily achieved by following the vision statement format suggested by the Indiana School Counselor Association (ISCA). ISCA (“Sample Vision Statements”, 2000) provides sample statements that begin with narrative descriptions of a school district’s desired future state. This section can summarize the school district’s values and beliefs regarding education. The narrative section is followed a detailed list of outcomes through which the achievement of the vision can be measured. These can include a variety of measurable elements ranging from attendance and discipline rates to test scores for students and professional development opportunities for staff. Four sample ISCA vision statements are included in Appendix B.

Agreement and Disagreement in the Field: Methods for Creating Vision Statements

Although there is widespread agreement regarding the value of vision statements, numerous methods are used in their development. Many people believe that a school superintendent or principal is responsible for providing a vision for the future (Isaacson & Bamburg, 1992). Many organizations assign the task of writing a vision statement to an administrative team or committee. Vision statements are often drafted at a retreat or seminar,
sometimes with the aid of a professional consultant (Brown, 1998). Unfortunately, there are two key liabilities in these methods. For a vision to be effective all the stakeholders in an organization must share it. However, popular methods often exclude the opinions of stakeholders, limiting the responsibility and commitment they will make to achieve the vision. Kolzow observed, “Every effort should be made to enroll or commit people to the vision, which means that they must want it. Otherwise, they will be merely compliant or apathetic” (1999, p.4). Full commitment to a vision is best achieved by including all stakeholders in the process of creating a vision statement. As Sergiovanni notes, “What counts in the end is bringing together the ideas and commitments of a variety of people who have a stake in the success of the school,” (as quoted by Peterson, 1995).

Another negative aspect of vision statements created by an individual or group at a meeting or retreat is that often a minimal amount of time is dedicated to the process. This can lead to the false assumption that the visioning process is complete when the meeting is over. Developing, communicating, and implementing an effective vision require ongoing effort. As Senge observed:

The problem is that usually it’s not a process; it’s an event. We all go off and write a vision statement and then go back to work. It’s absolutely pointless; it can even be counterproductive because people think, ‘we’ve done the vision stuff, and it didn’t make any difference’ (as quoted by O’Neill, 1995, p. 2).

Another method for creating vision statements involves conducting focus group discussions with representatives from each stakeholder group. Many management and leadership consultants recommend an extended series of meetings where issues regarding vision are discussed at length. While this method is truly collaborative, including all stakeholders and allowing sufficient time for them to participate, it is highly expensive in
terms of both finances and time. For many organizations, especially school districts with multiple demands and limited resources, such a process would be difficult if not impossible to conduct. Another drawback of focus groups is that their resulting data may be inaccurate. This problem is directly related to the small number of individuals that are involved. As S.R. Carroll and R. Carroll explain, “Since focus groups are based upon the opinions of a few people, the results are not generalizable to the entire population. The results are considered to be ‘soft data’ making them more vulnerable to public scrutiny” (2001, p.2).

Evaluation of Existing Research

Despite the negative aspects of the existing methods for creating vision statements, these approaches contain many valuable insights. It is especially useful to note the questions discussed in vision focus groups and questions asked on surveys conducted on similar topics. Appendix C provides several lists of sample questions often used in focus group discussions regarding vision statements and overall school reform.

Although many existing vision statements do not adhere to the guidelines discussed in this study, reviewing these statements can provide valuable insights. Appendix D contains a selection of existing vision statements.

In proposing an alternative method for creating a vision statement, this study draws upon the suggestions and practices used in existing methods to create a new approach that involves stakeholders in the visioning process in an economical and time-efficient manner.

In this study, it is suggested that a survey instrument could be an effective alternative to the existing methods of vision statement development. Survey research is a quantitative method of data collection, generating a large amount of information that can be statistically
analyzed and scientifically verified. Thus, survey results will “stand up to public scrutiny and can present a reliable and valid picture” of stakeholder opinions (S.R. Carroll & R. Carroll, 2001, p.2). Survey research offers several additional advantages. The resulting data can be used as a benchmark for comparing results or tracking progress toward a goal. When sent by mail, surveys allow participants to respond at their convenience in the privacy of their own homes (S.R. Carroll & R. Carroll, 2001). Survey research also allows each stakeholder group to participate in the visioning process in a manner that makes efficient use of both finances and time.
Chapter III

Methods and Materials

Data Needed

The purpose of this study is to develop a survey instrument to articulate the vision of key stakeholders in the Lawrence Township School District. The survey instrument was designed to elicit participants’ vision for student outcomes, system structure, and underlying beliefs, as recommended by Anderson (1993).

Sources of Data

Research indicates that the process of vision development must be collaborative. After conducting extensive research regarding school vision statements, authors Brown and Moffett underscored the importance of collaboration.

Perhaps the most significant thing we have learned is the importance of respectful involvement of all stakeholders in the vision quest, including students, parents, and community members. Without their involvement, our visions become mandates without meaning. Our stakeholders feel discounted and marginalized (Brown & Moffett, 1999, p. 3).

To insure the involvement of all stakeholders in the Lawrence Township School District, five key groups were targeted in this study. These groups include: current LTPS faculty and staff, parents of current LTPS students, LTPS students in grades 7-12, LTPS graduates, and Lawrence Township community members.

Tools and Techniques

Survey research presents an efficient method for collecting data from large numbers of people (R.B. Rubin, A.M. Rubin, & Piele, 2000). In this study, a survey was used to
collect detailed information regarding the vision of LTPS stakeholders. To elicit responses representing a full range of each participant’s views, the survey instrument included both closed and open-ended questions. While multiple-choice questions allow respondents to identify their preferences from an existing list of items, open-ended questions give participants more freedom in choosing their responses. These open-ended questions allow them to respond “in their own words, using their own categorizations and perceived associations” (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p.13). The surveys were tailored to each of the five stakeholder groups to which the survey was administered. Appendix E includes each version of the survey instrument.

Participants for the study were selected from each of the five target populations using several different sampling techniques. Strict confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by tracking only the respondents’ group affiliation (staff, student grade level, parent, graduate, community member). All surveys were retained for future use by LTPS.

The surveys were administered by LTPS to their staff and students in grades 7-12. Faculty and staff members were asked to complete the survey during staff meetings and students completed the survey during the homeroom session of their school day. After completing the survey, each participant placed the document into an envelope, which was then sealed to insure confidentiality. The completed staff surveys were then sorted using a random sampling technique. The completed student surveys were sorted using the stratified random sampling technique to insure that each grade level was equally represented.

Contact lists of LTPS graduates, parents of current LTPS students, and Lawrence Township community members were provided by LTPS. A random sample of each group was drawn and surveys mailed to the identified participants. To facilitate easy return, the
survey was prepared as a one-page document that could be folded into a self-mailed item with return postage paid. Of the 485 surveys mailed to LTPS graduates, parents, and Lawrence Township residents, 48 were returned.

Originally, it was planned that the final sample would reflect the population proportions of each of the five stakeholder groups. This was not possible due to a low rate of return on the surveys administered to LTPS graduates, parents, and Lawrence Township residents. The results of this survey still reflect the opinions of those stakeholders who desired to be involved, thus these results can be used to create a collaborative vision.

The final sample included 384 surveys, the number necessary to project scientifically accurate results at the 95 percent confidence level (Fulginiti, Bagin, Moore, Gallagher, & Tilden, 1988). This sample included the following numbers of each stakeholder group: LTPS faculty and staff, 168; LTPS students, 168; LTPS graduates, 2; LTPS parents, 10; Lawrence Township residents, 36.
Chapter IV

Research Results

This survey was conducted in April 2002. Surveys were mailed to LTPS graduates, parents of LTPS students, and Lawrence Township residents. Each survey included eight questions. The first three questions dealt with demographic information. The surveys were tailored to each stakeholder group with demographic questions differing slightly depending on the group to which the survey was sent. Questions four through eight addressed student outcomes, system structure, and underlying beliefs regarding the school district. These questions remained the same for each group. Copies of the survey instrument are provided in Appendix E.

Analysis of Data

On the surveys sent to LTPS graduates, parents, and Lawrence Township residents, question one identified the group to which each participant belonged. In the surveys sent to LTPS staff, question one addressed the length of time each participant worked at LTPS. Question one on the student surveys identified the current grade level of each participant. Table 1 on page 19 outlines the responses to this question. Figure 1 on page 19 illustrates the overall distribution of the sample.

Question two identified the gender of the participants. This question was the same for each stakeholder group. Table 2 on page 20 outlines the responses for this question. Figure 2 on page 20 illustrates the overall distribution of the sample.
Question three asked participants in each group how long they had lived in Lawrence Township. Table 3 on page 20 outlines the responses for this question. Figure 3 on page 21 illustrates the overall distribution of the sample.

Table 1. Survey Participants Overview

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Residents</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>Staff</td>
<td>168</td>
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<td>Students</td>
<td>168</td>
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Figure 1. Survey Participants Overview
Table 2. Participant Gender

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<th>384</th>
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<td>Blank</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Figure 2. Participant Gender

![Participant Gender Pie Chart]

Table 3. Length of Participant Residence in Lawrence Township

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Sample</th>
<th>384</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>406 years</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9 years</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 or more years</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not live in LT</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question four addressed student outcomes, specifically the skills and abilities most important for a high school graduate to possess. Participants were instructed to choose five qualities from a list of 13 choices. The responses indicated that the participants felt the following skills were most important: communication skills, comprehensive academic preparation, critical thinking skills, social skills, and problem-solving ability. Table 4 on page 26 outlines the number of responses in each category. Figure 4 on page 27 illustrates the distribution of the top five responses.

Questions five, six, and seven addressed the structure of the school system. Participants were asked to list two words to describe each of the following: an ideal school, an ideal teacher, and an ideal high school graduate. These open-ended questions allowed participants to use their own perceptions and categorizations to answer the questions, rather
than simply responding to a list of pre-set options. Responses were categorized according to similarity.

In question five, participants listed two words that described an ideal school. Responses fell into six general categories. The first category included references to a nurturing school community where students felt cared for and accepted. The key word for this category is *Nurturing*. The second category described a challenging learning environment with high academic standards of excellence. This category was assigned the key word *Challenging*. The next category addressed school facilities. These comments described state-of-the-art facilities, clean buildings, adequate resources, and access to technology. This category was assigned the key word *Modern Facilities*. The fourth category focused on safety and a sense of security, non-violence, and control. The key word for this category is *Safe*. The next category dealt with equality, fairness, and respect for differences. Respondents in this category described equality in assessment, punishment, and opportunities. The key word for this category is *Equal and Fair*. The final category focused on a fun and exciting learning environment with creative and stimulating experiences. The key word for this category is *Fun*. Table 5 on page 27 outlines the number of responses in each category. Figure 5 on page 28 illustrates the distribution of the top five responses.

In question six, participants listed two words that described an ideal teacher. Responses fell into seven general categories. The first set of responses described a patient, caring, and sensitive teacher who nurtured students and built personal relationships with them. The key word for this category is *Patient*. The second set of responses addressed a teacher’s intelligence, academic preparation, and knowledge of the subject matter. This category was assigned the key word *Intelligent*. The next category focused on a teacher’s
dedication and commitment both to students and to academic excellence. This category was labeled *Dedication*. The fourth category included responses focusing on a teacher’s enthusiasm and ability to inspire and motivate students. This category’s key word is *Enthusiastic*. The next category included references to a teacher’s creativity and the inclusion of fun classroom activities. The key word for this category is *Creative and Fun*. The sixth category addresses a teacher’s sense of social awareness and responsibility. This category’s key word is *Socially Conscious*. The final set of responses focused on respect and fairness in both assessment and discipline. The key word for this category is *Respectful and Fair*. Table 6 on page 28 outlines the number of responses in each category. Figure 6 on page 29 illustrates the distribution of the top five responses.

In question seven, participants listed two words that described an ideal high school graduate. Responses fell into six general categories. This first set of responses described a capable and well-prepared graduate who is ready to handle life’s challenges after high school. This category’s key word is *Capable*. The second category addressed the knowledge, intelligence, and academic preparation of a graduate. The key word for this category is *Knowledgeable*. The next category focused on a graduate’s confident, out-going nature and optimistic outlook. The key word for this category is *Confident*. The fourth category described a graduate’s maturity and responsibility. The key word for this category is *Mature*. The next category included responses focusing on respect for self, authority, and others and an overall sense of fair play. This category’s key word is *Respectful and Fair*. The final category described an open minded graduate who is curious about the world and eager to learn and embrace new experiences. The key word for this category is
Open Minded. The Table 7 on page 29 outlines the number of responses in each category. Figure 7 on page 30 illustrates the distribution of the top five responses.

Question eight addressed participants’ underlying beliefs regarding the purpose of the school district. Since the mission of LTPS is to provide extraordinary learning experiences, participants were asked to briefly describe such an experience. Again, the open-ended nature of this question gave participants complete freedom in choosing their answers. Responses were categorized according to similarity.

In question eight, participants gave examples of extraordinary learning experiences. Responses fell into nine general categories. The first set of responses described caring, dedicated teachers who inspire, motivate, and encourage students to succeed. Individual teachers were also named along with the contributions they made to students’ lives. The key word for this category is Teacher. The second category addressed experiences that allow students to apply their knowledge to specific, real-world situations. Participants described the value of these experiences in preparing students for the work force and allowing students to see the relevance of their studies. The key word for this category is Applying Knowledge. The next category involved interacting with others and assisting in the learning process. Participants described community involvement, peer tutoring, and collaborative projects in this category. The key word is Interaction. The fourth category addressed academic achievement. Participants focused on high grades, achievement tests, special awards, and the thrill of mastering difficult concepts. The key word for this category is Academic Achievement. The fifth category focused on hands-on experiences where students take part in projects, experiments, and research. The key word for this category is Hands-On Activities.
The next category dealt with off-campus activities. Participants cited field trips, travel, cultural experiences, and performing arts attendance. The key word for this category is *Off-Campus Activities*. The seventh category included experiences that were both fun and educational. Participants described learning-based games, fun activities, and creative lesson plans that merged learning with entertainment. The key word for this category is *Fun and Educational*. The eighth category involved equality, fairness, and multi-culturalism. Celebrating differences, learning about other cultures, and standing for equality were all cited as extraordinary experiences in this category. The key word is *Equality*. Responses in the final category referred to extra-curricular activities ranging from athletics to the performing arts. Participants cited the sense of community and pride involved in belonging to school clubs, the value of group activities, and feeling of accomplishment in competition. The key word for this category is *Extra-Curricular Activities*. Table 8 on page 31 outlines the number of responses in each category. Figure 8 on page 32 illustrates the distribution of the top five responses.
Table 4. Most Important Skills for High School Graduates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive Academic Preparation</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking Skills</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving Ability</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Self-Image</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for the Work Force</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Skills</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Conscience</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity for Intellectual Inquiry</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Skills</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Emotions</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Skills</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 4. Most Important Skills for High School Graduates

Top 5 Skills for High School Graduates

- Communication Skills
- Comprehensive Academic Preparation
- Critical Thinking Skills
- Social Skills
- Problem-Solving Ability

Table 5. Descriptions of an Ideal School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nurturing</th>
<th>180</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Facilities</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safe</th>
<th>111</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal and Fair</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. **Descriptions of an Ideal School**

Top 5 Descriptions of an Ideal School

![Pie chart showing the top 5 descriptions of an ideal school]

- Nurturing (110 votes)
- Challenging (180 votes)
- Modern Facilities (113 votes)
- Safe (111 votes)
- Equal and Fair (171 votes)

Table 6. **Descriptions of an Ideal Teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Total Votes</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative and Fun</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful and Fair</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socially Conscious</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 6. Descriptions of an Ideal Teacher

Top 5 Descriptions of an Ideal Teacher

Table 7. Descriptions of an Ideal High School Graduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Capable</th>
<th>Knowledgeable</th>
<th>Confident</th>
<th>Mature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Respectful and Fair</th>
<th>Open Minded</th>
<th>Blank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Patient
- Intelligent
- Dedicated
- Enthusiastic
- Creative and Fun
Figure 7. Descriptions of an Ideal High School Graduate

Top 5 Descriptions of an Ideal High School Graduate

- Capable
- Knowledgeable
- Confident
- Mature
- Respectful
### Table 8. Examples of Extraordinary Learning Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Type</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Residents</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated Teachers</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Knowledge</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with Others</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-On Activities</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-Campus Activities</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun and Educational</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-Curricular Activities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 8. Examples of Extraordinary Learning Experiences

Examples of Extraordinary Learning Experiences

- Teachers: 46%
- Applying Knowledge: 70%
- Interacting with Others: 52%
- Academic Achievement: 53%
- Hands-On Activities: 49%
Chapter V

Discussion and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to create a scientific research instrument that would allow all stakeholders in a school district to share their vision for the future in a manner that was efficient in terms of both cost and time. This study, which was conducted at a minimal cost, clearly indicates the preferences of stakeholders in Lawrence Township regarding their vision for student outcomes and system structure as well as their underlying beliefs and attitudes about education.

This survey instrument can serve as a benchmark, against which the school district can measure emerging attitudes and trends. The survey instrument is also a template, which can be adapted and utilized by other organizations to assess their publics’ vision for the future.

Significant Findings

The results of this study clearly indicate participant preferences regarding their vision for LTPS. Answers to each survey question were widely distributed, indicating that the community embraces a wide view of the nature and goals of education.

While questions one, two, and three dealt with demographic information, question four addressed student outcomes. This question specifically asked what five skills the participant viewed as most important for a high school graduate to possess. The answers to this question were widely distributed, with the top response encompassing 12.5 percent of the total number. The top five answers included communication skills, comprehensive academic preparation, critical thinking skills, social skills, and problem solving ability. Positive self image, ability to
Questions five, six, seven, and eight were open-ended, giving participants complete freedom in choosing their own responses. Participants were asked to list two words to describe each of the following: an ideal school, an ideal teacher, and an ideal high school graduate. These open-ended questions allowed participants to use their own perceptions and categorizations to answer the questions, rather than simply responding to a list of pre-set options. Responses were categorized according to similarity. For identification purposes, each category was assigned a key word, however, these categories are best understood using the narrative descriptions provided in Chapter IV beginning on page 22. These descriptions encompass the breadth of responses more accurately than the simple one-word labels.

Question five addressed participants' definitions of the ideal school. The answers easily fell into six categories. Two responses emerged over the rest: the ideal school as a nurturing community (180 responses) and as a challenging learning environment (171 responses). Also gaining at least 14 percent of the responses were descriptions of state-of-the-art facilities and adequate resources (113 responses), a safe and secure environment (111 responses), and equality, fairness, and respect (110 responses).

The top responses to question six demonstrated pronounced participant preferences for one of the seven categories. This question asked participants to describe the ideal teacher. Over
33 percent of the answers (245 responses) described the ideal teacher as patient, sensitive and caring. The second highest response rate described intelligent, academically prepared teachers who possess a deep knowledge of the subject matter. Nearly 20 percent of the answers were included in this category (150 responses). It is interesting to note that these descriptions of the ideal teacher mirror the top descriptions of the ideal school, which was depicted as a nurturing community and a challenging learning environment. A significant number of participants also described ideal teachers as dedicated (103 responses), enthusiastic (95 responses), and creative (93 responses).

Answers for questions seven, which asked participants to describe the ideal high school graduate, fell into six categories. Three of these categories received the vast majority of the responses. Nearly 25 percent (188 responses) of participants described the ideal graduate as capable and well prepared. Another 25 percent (187 responses) described ideal graduates as knowledgeable and intelligent. Approximately 20 percent of the participants (161 responses) valued confidence and self-assurance in a graduate, while 16 percent (126 responses) described ideal graduates as mature and responsible. These responses indicate the community's perception of preparation and intelligence as necessary for high school graduates.

The final question addressed the mission statement of LTPS, which refers to the school district's commitment to providing extraordinary learning experiences. By giving examples of extraordinary learning experiences, participants provided information about both their definition of this term and the value they place on different school activities.

Answers to this question were quite varied, necessitating nine categories to encompass the breadth of the responses. However, one category included many more responses than the others. Nearly 20 percent, or 70 responses, stated that caring teachers who inspire, motivate, and
encourage students to succeed exemplify extraordinary learning experiences. Four other categories included over 10 percent of the responses. Applying knowledge to real world situations included 53 responses, interacting and assisting others included 52 responses, high academic achievement included 49 responses, and hands-on learning experiences included 46 responses.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the responses to this survey indicate that the community believes schools should be nurturing environments where students receive innovative and challenging academic instruction from caring teachers, and where they are prepared for the academic and social demands of the future. Although the answers to each question varied greatly, the top responses all referred to three over-arching themes: a nurturing school environment, creative teaching strategies, and high academic achievement. These themes were repeated throughout the survey and form the foundation for creating a shared vision.

By incorporating these themes with the vision statement guidelines and sample formats drawn from existing research, LTPS can draft a vision statement that will effectively prioritize improvement efforts by reflecting the views of its stakeholders. Although school district representatives will undertake the final task of writing the official LTPS vision statement, the findings of this study should impact the content and format of the final statement. A sample statement is included in this study to assist in developing the final document.

The sample statement was written according to the guidelines discussed in Chapter II, using the Guidelines Checklist found in Appendix A. This statement addresses the three general themes identified through the stakeholder survey and incorporates the most frequent answers to
each survey question. The format of this statement is borrowed from the ISCA model vision statements discussed in Chapter II and included in Appendix B.

This sample statement is intended only as a model. The final statement, drafted by LTPS representatives, may or may not resemble this sample statement. However, it should incorporate the themes identified in this study and include specific goals and outcome measurements relevant to Lawrence Township. The sample vision statement for LTPS is found on page 39.

**Contribution to the Field and Relation of Study to Previous Research**

Although research abounds concerning the nature and significance of vision statements, there has not been a significant amount of research on cost-effective and time-efficient methods for creating vision statements. This study summarizes existing vision research and creates a new method for developing vision statements. This study builds on previous research by incorporating the suggestions of education, planning, and management experts in the creation of a new survey instrument, guidelines checklist, and sample vision statement format.

This new survey instrument allows all stakeholders in a school district to share their thoughts, opinions, and attitudes regarding their vision for the future in a manner that is efficient in terms of both cost and time and that is based on scientific research techniques. It can serve as a benchmark, against which a school district can measure progress toward its goals. The instrument is also a template, which could be used by other organizations to assess their publics' vision for the future. This study also summarizes relevant vision research in an easy-to-use checklist containing guidelines for writing a vision statement.
Limitations of study

Although the sample vision statement in this study draws directly from the visions of LTPS stakeholders, community commitment to the vision cannot be assured. The overall effectiveness of the vision statement in prioritizing improvement efforts and uniting LTPS stakeholders cannot be determined until the vision is implemented. Even then, the vision statement’s effectiveness depends greatly on the manner in which it is presented to the public, utilized in strategic planning, and embraced by stakeholders.

However, this study does provide a solid foundation on scientifically valid information regarding the community’s vision for LTPS that will greatly enhance the extent to which the final vision statement reflects stakeholder vision.

Another limitation involves the final distribution of the survey sample. Due to low survey return rates, the distribution of the sample does not proportionately resemble the population. However, the survey results do reflect the members of the population that wished to be involved. Thus, the results provide a valid picture of stakeholder opinion.

Further research

This study provides a cost and time-effective alternative for organizations that wish to include stakeholder collaboration in creating vision statements. However, additional research could enhance this study and verify the effectiveness of this method for developing vision statements. After the official vision statement has been developed and implemented by LTPS, a probability study involving all stakeholders could determine the extent to which the final statement reflects the vision of the community.
Lawrence Township Public Schools
Vision for the Future

We envision a nurturing community of learners, where all people are treated with kindness, fairness, and respect. As role models, our teachers inspire and motivate students to succeed in school and in life. As responsible citizens, our students respect their peers, their teachers, and themselves. As concerned stakeholders, our local community supports our efforts.

This vision will be realized by achieving the following outcomes by June 2005:
- Teachers rewarded for exemplary performance = increased percentage (set by LTPS)
- Students earning recognition for positive behavior = increased percentage
- Participation in character education programs = 100%
- Expulsion and suspension rates = decreased percentage
- Discipline referrals to principal = decreased percentage
- Community members attending school events = increased percentage
- Community members expressing support = increased percentage

We envision stimulating educational experiences that inspire students to become lifelong learners. Our teachers employ creative strategies that allow students to learn experientially and to apply their knowledge to real-life scenarios. Our students develop skills and abilities that prepare them to meet the challenges of school and of life.

This vision will be realized by achieving the following outcomes by June 2005:
- Teachers utilizing creative strategies = 100%
- Teachers pursuing professional development = 100%
- Students planning to continue education after high school = increased percentage
- Students mastering basic skills tests = 100%

We envision a challenging learning environment where all students achieve academic success. Our teachers are dedicated to academic excellence for their students and themselves. Our students possess both factual knowledge and critical thinking skills. Our facilities, resources, and technological access enhance our educational goals.

This vision will be realized by achieving the following outcomes by June 2005:
- Teachers earning academic honors and/or advanced degrees = increased percentage
- Students earning above average score on standardized tests = increased percentage
- Students earning academic honors = increased percentage
- Graduation rate = 100%
- Students entering post-secondary education = increased percentage
- Access to resources and technology = increased rate

Sample Vision Statement for Lawrence Township Public Schools
The effectiveness of this method of creating vision statements could also be assessed by comparing a statement created with this method to a statement created with the conventional methods involving focus groups or administrative personnel. This survey instrument could also be adapted for use in other organizations or industries.

Final Reflections

An educator’s mission is to prepare young people to face an uncertain future. Vision statements allow educators to transcend the challenges and obstacles that stand in the way of that mission.

Vision is a powerful force that can unite individuals and mobilize organizations. Vision allows us to picture the future we desire and then take the steps to make that image a reality. This study is offered in hopes that it will assist others in developing their vision for the future and making their dreams a reality.
REFERENCES


Change requires an understanding of how systems work. (1996, September). *The Developer*.


Richardson, J. (1996, September). If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you arrive? School Team Innovator.


APPENDIX A
APPENDIX A

Creating a Vision Statement: Guidelines Checklist

Based on current research, vision statements should address the following topics:

- Student outcomes
- System structure
- Underlying beliefs
- Facility
- Curriculum
- Instruction
- Assessment
- Staff
- Community

Additionally, school vision statements should include the following:

- A compelling picture or image of what the school can become in the future
- Feasible and attainable goals
- A connection with deeper values and hopes for the future
- Actions and plans that can be implemented
- Clearly described aims that are measurable and tangible
- A non-negotiable end-date presenting a reasonable degree of challenge (usually three to five years from the present)
- A focus on student learning, emphasizing higher-order thinking and problem solving
- A view consistent with the current status of the organization as well as important educational and societal trends
- An unlimited view of resources, assuming that needed materials will be secured
- Compliance with the organization’s history, culture, and values
- A clearly and concisely written statement, avoiding jargon and empty slogans

Peterson, “Critical Issue: Building a Collective Vision”, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995
Valentine, “Vision Statement”, Middle Level Leadership Center Online, 2001
APPENDIX B
Sample Vision Statement for Elementary Schools

We believe that all students can learn and be successful. We believe that teachers are good role models who provide a variety of strategies to ensure student success. We believe that every child deserves rich educational and career guidance in order to develop self-knowledge, which is necessary to make sound educational and career decisions. We believe all children inherently want to do well and we must all share the responsibility for helping them reach their potential.

In order to develop good students and citizens, our community places a high value on education. Parents, teachers, school counselors, and community members share the responsibility for providing a safe and caring environment in which children learn and grow. Teachers take responsibility for communicating high expectations with students and parents in order for students to reach high educational goals. Teachers and others provide learning opportunities for all students, which address each student's individual academic needs.

All students accept challenges, show ownership, and put forth admirable effort in their education. Each student sets goals and is intrinsically motivated to do his or her best. Students display appropriate behavior and accept responsibility for their actions. All students demonstrate good citizenship and team-building skills. All students possess the self-knowledge, educational and career awareness, and planning skills necessary to make sound educational and career decisions. Students demonstrate mastery of a high level of academic achievement.

As a result of these efforts, the student body displays the following characteristics:

Attendance Rate 97%
3rd Graders Mastering State Essential Skills (ISTEP+) 100%
Expulsion and Suspension Rates 0%
Discipline Referrals to Principal 0%
Mastery of Curriculum at or Above Grade Level 100%
Students Have Educational Goals for Elementary School 100%
Students Mastering Locally Defined ECS Competencies 100%
Students Having Plans to Continue Education After High School 100%
Sample Vision Statement for Middle or Junior High Schools

We believe that all students deserve a rich educational experience which encourages student to reach high levels of achievement and contribute as citizens of their community. As adults, we believe we are responsible for providing innovating and challenging experiences that enable students to achieve their potential as well as provide an atmosphere of dignity and pride. We believe that students deserve the guidance which provides them with skills needed to handle the multiple adolescent changes at this age, and skills needed to develop their educational and career goals, plus the means to accomplish those goals.

Therefore, teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and community members have the following responsibilities: 1) to create a curriculum that teaches each student to obtain their highest potential, 2) to help students strive to learn the knowledge and skills needed to face their futures in the real world, 3) to give student support during the early adolescent years by providing encouragement and guidance in a manner that makes each student feel important and respected, 4) to provide an atmosphere that is safe, positive, and enjoyable.

All students have high expectations of themselves. All students learn the skills and knowledge needed to face their futures in the real world based on educational and career goals for high school and post high school education. All students exhibit high self esteem, respect for fellow students and adults, and a joy for coming to school.

As a result of these efforts, the student body displays the following characteristics:

Attendance Rate 97%
Mastery of State Essential Skills (ISTEP+) 100%
Rate of Suspension and Expulsion 0%
Students Having Educational and Career Goals 100%
Middle School Graduates Enroll in Algebra or Higher in 9th Grade 100%
Students Earning Recognition for Positive Behavior 100%
Students Receiving Positive Communication From School to Home 100%
Students Involved in Extracurricular Activities 100%
Students Involved in Career Curriculum Activities All Three Years 100%
Sample Vision Statement for High Schools

We believe that all students are capable of high achievement. We believe that educators make a difference in students lives. We believe that every child deserves to be surrounded by a culture of high expectations and a rich array of options for the future. We believe that every child deserves rich educational and career guidance in order to define the pathways to the options he or she chooses. We believe that every child deserves rich curriculum, instruction, and services to be able to realize his or her personal aspirations developed through the guidance process.

Therefore, teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and community members have high expectations of all students, and work together to help all students reach those expectations. Teachers integrate curriculum between disciplines, and provide students with challenging work tasks which require students to research and apply learned knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems. School and community members are not satisfied when most or many students reach high expectations. Instead, they are committed to helping all students achieve lofty goals. To reach all students, teachers vary their teaching methodologies to match students' learning styles. School and community members involve all students in well-organized work-based learning experiences with appropriate school-based academic and career development curriculum.

All students have high expectations of themselves and are actively involved in their learning. Students accept ownership and responsibility for their education. Each student eagerly pursues academic and career education, and participates in integrated projects requiring the student to use knowledge and skills to solve challenging real-world problems. All students are involved in work-based learning experiences where they apply academic knowledge and skills. Students are well-motivated with strong self esteem, and approach learning with a clear sense of purpose. Students exhibit strong personal management, citizenship, and team-building skills. Each student possesses the self-knowledge, educational and career awareness, and skills required to make sound educational and career decisions. All students have meaningful future plans with tentative career selections and corresponding course work selections.

As a result of these efforts, our students displays the following characteristics:

Attendance Rate 97%
Graduation Rate 100%
10th Graders Passing ISTEP Math & Language Standards 100%
Students Working Toward Mastery of the Core 40 Curriculum 100%
Students Earning Indiana Academic Honors Diploma 100%
SAT Composite Scores (all juniors take SAT): 1300

Students Taking Post High School Courses Prior to Graduation 100%

Students Earning 3 or Higher on Advanced Placement Exams 100%

Rate of Expulsion or Suspension 0%

Student Entering Post High School Education 100%

Students Completing Post High School Education 100%

Students Involved in Internships 100%

Students Having Career Plans 100%

Students Making Post High School Education Visits 100%

Students Receiving Scholarships and / or Financial Aid 100%

Students Receiving Certificates of Technical Achievement 100%

Sample Vision Statement for Adult Schools

We believe that all adults are capable of reaching their fullest potential. We believe that education and workforce development counselors can make a difference in an adult's life. We believe that every adult deserves rich educational and career guidance to be aware of all the options available. We believe that every adult deserves instruction and all services necessary to realize his or her personal aspirations as they are developed through the career exploration process. We believe with this support, all adults are capable of making a viable career decision and becoming productive citizens.

Therefore, educational and workforce development counselors, workshop facilitators, employment specialists, administrators, and other supportive agencies have high expectations of all adults and will work together to help adults reach those expectations. Workshop facilitators integrate curriculum to make it applicable to the occupational world of work and adults are provided with challenging tasks which require them to research and apply learned knowledge and skills to the problem solving process. Counselors and workshop facilitators will vary their teaching methodologies to accommodate all learning styles, and informational interviews will provide adults with the information necessary to narrow their career options in order to determine a viable career goal.

All adults have high expectations of themselves and are actively involved in the learning and career decision making process. Adults are motivated with strong self-esteem and
approach learning with a clear sense of purpose. Each adult possesses strong personal management skills, team-building skills, self-knowledge, labor market knowledge, educational and career awareness, and skills required to make sound decisions. All adults have meaningful future career plans and the skills necessary to implement the plans.

As a result of these efforts, the adult population displays the following characteristics:

Adults Attending Workshops 100%
Adults Completing Workshops 100%
Adults Having a Career Plan 100%
Adults Completing an Informational Interview 100%
Adults Taking College Entrance Exams 100%
Adults Making Campus / Vocational School Visits 100%
Adults Receiving Scholarships and Financial Awards 100%
Adults Involved in Study Groups 100%
Adults Involved in Work Experience Programs 100%
Adults Gaining Viable and Appropriate Employment 100%
APPENDIX C
APPENDIX C

Sample Questions Used in Vision Focus Groups


What do students need to learn and be able to do?
What do teachers need to learn and be able to do?
What’s the best way for teachers to learn this?
How will we know if teachers are using what they have learned?
What’s the impact of this new knowledge and skills on students?


What kind of school do we want for our children and staff?
How will students benefit from attendance at our school?
How will their success be measured or demonstrated?
What will students learn? How will they learn?
If parents had a choice, on what basis would they choose to send their children to our school?
Of all the educational innovations and research, which strategies should we seek to employ in our school?


To what extent have I articulated my personal vision for myself and my role in educator?
To what extent can I describe my vision for the purpose of education?
How would I express my values concerning the role that schools should play in the lives of their students?
What is my vision for a “preferred future” for my school and my school system?
To what extent do I demonstrate a capacity for personal and shared inquiry as a value in my professional life?
In what ways do I operate at cross-purposes with the expressed vision of my school and system?
To what extent do I contribute to shared inquiry and investigation within my school and system?
To what extent have I overcome a tendency to be a “Lone Ranger”?
How do I contribute to work groups and study groups within my work site?
To what extent do I reflect on and work to improve my capacity for emotional intelligence, self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and interpersonal skills?
How can I become more resilient personally and professionally?
To what extent do the members of our school community share a common vision for the
purpose and direction of education?
To what extent do we revisit our expressed vision and ensure that it guides and informs all
facets of our decision-making and problem-solving processes?
How do we demonstrate that we understand that the vision-making and realization process is
dynamic and on-going?
To what extent do our collective and individual actions reflect our vision?
To what extent are they at odds with it?
How do we communicate the values, norms, and organizational principles that define us as a
learning organization?
To what extent are inquiry and shared investigation norms within our school?
How do we involve parents and community members in these ongoing processes?
To what extent do our students perceive themselves as an intrinsic part of a learning
community?
What students demonstrate alienation and estrangement from the school and its
organizational culture, how do we work to assimilate them?
How do we ensure that our organization development processes is dynamic and
organic, rather than static?
To what extent do we promote a collaborative work culture in our school?
How do we make use of peer coaching, study groups, and action research to eliminate staff
and student isolation and to solve identity problems?
To what extent do we all understand and have the ability to articulate the paradigm that
shapes the thinking and operations of our school system?
How does our school system articulate and ensure a shared vision that we all support?
To what extent do our system leaders share their vision for education?
To what extent do the norms, mores, operating principles or our school system encourage
rather than stifle the change process?
How does our system promote schools as learning communities?
To what extent does our system ensure that all schools successfully address the needs of all
students, attending to their needs while promoting their individuals strengths and
personal vision for their future?
How does our system promote hope and possibility rather than despair and limitation?
To what extent does our school system engage all stakeholders in planning for the future of
our students?
How does our school system promote norms of collaboration rather than isolation?
To what extent does our system encounter creative problem-solving and alternative
approaches to decision making?
To what extent does our school system empower school-based staffs and the communities
they serve?
How does our school system “manage the unknowable”?
What is unique about our organization?
Who are our principal clients?
What are our primary services?
What is different about us from three years ago?
What will be different about us three years from now?
What philosophical issues are important to the school’s future?

Describe what an observer would see and hear in a school in which students were actively engaged and achieving to high levels in a challenging curriculum. Consider:

- The tasks and activities that students would be engaged in
- How teachers would assess student learning and performance
- What teachers would be doing
- What materials and resources students and teachers would be using

How is this vision of learning different than what occurs now in your school? Consider:

- The tasks and activities that students would be engaged in
- How teachers would assess student learning and performance
- What teachers would be doing
- What materials and resources students and teachers would be using
Lawrence Township Public Schools

Dear LTPS Graduate:

A vision is an image of an ideal future. What is your vision for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools?

We are planning ways to make our schools better. But we need your help! For our schools to truly represent our community, we need your input. Think about what you want for our school district then answer these questions. Please be as open and honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be completely confidential.

When you are finished answering all the questions, simply fold this postage-paid sheet so that the return address is showing, tape it closed, and drop it in a mail.

Thank you for your time, your input, and your concern for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools.

Questions begin on the other side of this page.

To return this postage-paid survey, fold this sheet so the return address is showing, tape it closed, and drop it in the mail.

Mail to:
Lawrence Township Public Schools Vision Survey
c/o Jessica Haviland
186 Rumson Drive
Galloway, NJ 08205

Note: The original surveys were formatted on 8.5" by 14" legal sized paper and folded into a self-mailed packet.
Please answer each question as openly and honestly as you can.

1. Put a check beside the descriptions that apply to you.
   - [ ] Member of Lawrence Township Public Schools faculty or staff
   - [ ] Parent of a student in Lawrence Township Public Schools
   - [ ] Graduate of Lawrence Township Public Schools
   - [ ] Resident of Lawrence Township with no children currently in public school

2. What is your gender?  [ ] Male  [ ] Female

3. How long have you lived in Lawrence Township?
   - [ ] under 1 year  [ ] 1-3 years  [ ] 4-6 years  [ ] 7-9 years  [ ] 10 or more years

4. What skills and abilities do you think are most important for a high school graduate?
   Place a check beside the five (5) qualities you feel are most important.
   - [ ] Comprehensive academic preparation
   - [ ] Critical thinking skills
   - [ ] Development of conscience
   - [ ] Positive self image
   - [ ] Communication Skills
   - [ ] Physical skills
   - [ ] Ability to function successfully in the work force
   - [ ] Leadership skills
   - [ ] Understanding of life skills
   - [ ] Understanding of human emotions

5. List two words that describe an ideal school.
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

6. List two words that describe an ideal teacher.
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

7. List two words that describe an ideal high school graduate.
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

8. The mission of Lawrence Township Public Schools is to provide “extraordinary learning experiences.”
   In the space below, give an example of an “extraordinary learning experience.”
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.
Please follow the folding instructions on the back and mail this survey as soon as you can.
Lawrence Township Public Schools

Dear Parents/Guardians:

A vision is an image of an ideal future. What is your vision for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools?

We are planning ways to make our schools better. But we need your help! For our schools to truly represent our community, we need your input. Think about what you want for our school district then answer these questions. Please be as open and honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be completely confidential.

When you are finished answering all the questions, simply fold this postage-paid sheet so that the return address is showing, tape it closed, and drop it in a mail.

Thank you for your time, your input, and your concern for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools.

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Please answer each question as openly and honestly as you can.

1. Put a check beside the descriptions that apply to you.
   ___ Member of Lawrence Township Public Schools faculty or staff
   ___ Parent of a student in Lawrence Township Public Schools
   ___ Graduate of Lawrence Township Public Schools
   ___ Resident of Lawrence Township with no children currently in public school

2. What is your gender? ___ Male ___ Female

3. How long have you lived in Lawrence Township?
   ___ under 1 year ___ 1-3 years ___ 4-6 years ___ 7-9 years ___ 10 or more years

4. What skills and abilities do you think are most important for a high school graduate?
   Place a check beside the five (5) qualities you feel are most important.
   ___ Comprehensive academic preparation ___ Capacity for intellectual inquiry
   ___ Critical thinking skills ___ Problem solving ability
   ___ Development of conscience ___ Social skills
   ___ Positive self image ___ Understanding of life skills
   ___ Communication Skills ___ Leadership skills
   ___ Physical skills ___ Understanding of human emotions
   ___ Ability to function successfully in the work force

5. List two words that describe an ideal school.
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

6. List two words that describe an ideal teacher.
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

7. List two words that describe an ideal high school graduate.
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

8. The mission of Lawrence Township Public Schools is to provide “extraordinary learning experiences.”
   In the space below, give an example of an “extraordinary learning experience.”
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.

Please follow the folding instructions on the back and mail this survey as soon as you can.
Lawrence Township Public Schools

Dear Parents/Guardians:

A vision is an image of an ideal future. What is your vision for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools?

We are planning ways to make our schools better. But we need your help! For our schools to truly represent our community, we need your input. Think about what you want for our school district then answer these questions. Please be as open and honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be completely confidential.

When you are finished answering all the questions, simply fold this postage-paid sheet so that the return address is showing, tape it closed, and drop it in the mail.

Thank you for your time, your input, and your concern for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools.

Questions begin on the other side of this page.

To return this postage-paid survey, fold this sheet so the return address is showing, tape it closed, and drop it in the mail.

Mail to:

Lawrence Township Public Schools Vision Survey

  c/o Jessica Haviland
  186 Rumson Drive
  Galloway, NJ 08205

Note: The original surveys were formatted on 8.5” by 14” legal sized paper and folded into a self-mailed packet.
Please answer each question as openly and honestly as you can.

1. Put a check beside the descriptions that apply to you.
   - Member of Lawrence Township Public Schools faculty or staff
   - Parent of a student in Lawrence Township Public Schools
   - Graduate of Lawrence Township Public Schools
   - Resident of Lawrence Township with no children currently in public school

2. What is your gender?  Male  Female

3. How long have you lived in Lawrence Township?
   - under 1 year
   - 1-3 years
   - 4-6 years
   - 7-9 years
   - 10 or more years

4. What skills and abilities do you think are most important for a high school graduate?
   *Place a check beside the five (5) qualities you feel are most important.*
   - Comprehensive academic preparation
   - Critical thinking skills
   - Development of conscience
   - Positive self image
   - Communication Skills
   - Physical skills
   - Leadership skills
   - Understanding of human emotions
   - Capacity for intellectual inquiry
   - Problem solving ability
   - Social skills
   - Understanding of life skills

5. List two words that describe an ideal school.

6. List two words that describe an ideal teacher.

7. List two words that describe an ideal high school graduate.

8. The mission of Lawrence Township Public Schools is to provide “extraordinary learning experiences.”
   In the space below, give an example of an “extraordinary learning experience.”

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.

Please follow the folding instructions on the back and mail this survey as soon as you can.
Dear Faculty and Staff Members:

A vision is an image of an ideal future. What is your vision for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools?

We are planning ways to make our schools better. But we need your help! For our schools to truly represent our community, we need your input. Think about what you want for our school district then answer these questions. Please be as open and honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be completely confidential.

Thank you for your time, your input, and your concern for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools.

Please answer each question as openly and honestly as you can.

1. How long have you been working at Lawrence Township Public Schools?
   ( ) under 1 year  ( ) 1-5 years  ( ) 6-10 years  ( ) 11-15 years  ( ) 16 or more years

2. What is your gender?  ( ) Male  ( ) Female

3. How long have you lived in Lawrence Township?
   ( ) under 1 year  ( ) 1-3 years  ( ) 4-6 years  ( ) 7-9 years  ( ) 10 or more years
   ( ) do not live here

4. What skills and abilities do you think are most important for a high school graduate?
   Place a check beside the five (5) qualities you feel are most important.
   ( ) Comprehensive academic preparation  ( ) Capacity for intellectual inquiry
   ( ) Critical thinking skills  ( ) Problem solving ability
   ( ) Development of conscience  ( ) Social skills
   ( ) Positive self image  ( ) Understanding of life skills
   ( ) Communication Skills  ( ) Leadership skills
   ( ) Physical skills  ( ) Understanding of human emotions
   ( ) Ability to function successfully in the work force

Questions continue on the other side.
5. List two words that describe an ideal school.

__________________________  __________________________

6. List two words that describe an ideal teacher.

__________________________  __________________________

7. List two words that describe an ideal high school graduate.

__________________________  __________________________

8. The mission of Lawrence Township Public Schools is to provide “extraordinary learning experiences.” In the space below, give an example of an “extraordinary learning experience.”


Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.
Dear Students:

A vision is an image of an ideal future. What is your vision for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools?

We are planning ways to make our schools better. But we need your help! For our schools to truly represent our community, we need your input. Think about what you want for our school district then answer these questions. Please be as open and honest as you can. There are no right or wrong answers and all responses will be completely confidential.

Thank you for your time, your input, and your concern for the future of Lawrence Township Public Schools.

Please answer each question as openly and honestly as you can.

1. What grade are you currently enrolled in?
   - [ ] 7  - [ ] 8  - [ ] 9  - [ ] 10  - [ ] 11  - [ ] 12

2. What is your gender?  
   - [ ] Male  - [ ] Female

3. How long have you lived in Lawrence Township?
   - [ ] under 1 year  - [ ] 1-3 years  - [ ] 4-6 years  - [ ] 7-9 years  - [ ] 10 or more years

4. What skills and abilities do you think are most important for a high school graduate?  
   Place a check beside the five (5) qualities you feel are most important.
   - [ ] Comprehensive academic preparation  - [ ] Capacity for intellectual inquiry
   - [ ] Critical thinking skills  - [ ] Problem solving ability
   - [ ] Development of conscience  - [ ] Social skills
   - [ ] Positive self image  - [ ] Understanding of life skills
   - [ ] Communication Skills  - [ ] Leadership skills
   - [ ] Physical skills  - [ ] Understanding of human emotions
   - [ ] Ability to function successfully in the work force

Questions continue on the other side.
5. List two words that describe an ideal school.

_________________________  ___________________________

6. List two words that describe an ideal teacher.

_________________________  ___________________________

7. List two words that describe an ideal high school graduate.

_________________________  ___________________________

8. The mission of Lawrence Township Public Schools is to provide “extraordinary learning experiences.” In the space below, give an example of an “extraordinary learning experience.”

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing this survey. We appreciate your input.