Educational Mission Statements: Determining How Mission Impacts Curricular and Policy Decisions at the Hudson School

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Educational Mission Statements: Determining How Mission Impacts Curricular and Policy Decisions at The Hudson School

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education Seton Hall University

2003
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

On January 8, 2002 President Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB). At the signing, President George W. Bush expressed his belief that the NCLB act would strengthen the mission of public education, which is to build the mind and character of every child in America. The NCLB law will hold schools accountable for student learning as measured by test results and will offer parents options when the local public school does not achieve those results. According to Falsey (1989), accountability can be maintained through a mission statement focused on purpose and identity. Members of a school community need to know the core beliefs and values of the school in order to carry out the mission and goals. When relating the mission of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), Patrick F. Bassett explained that given the changing demographics of school age children, private schools must have a very public purpose. Any strategic planning involving school reform must take place within the context of the school’s mission. Bassett (2001) asserted that schools whose decisions are rooted in their mission last, while those whose aren’t don’t last.

The NCLB law seeks to hold schools, both public and private, more accountable for the academic success of their students. According to Levin (1988), private schools have served as a source of innovative educational models. In America, there have always been schools operated by various religious organizations and by agencies seeking to
educate children who could not be accommodated in traditional schools. According to Amundsen, Gryspeerdt and Moxness (1993), private schools use their mission statements to identify themselves and to reach members of their target population. Innovative practices rooted in the school’s mission are encouraged at many independent private schools. For example, activities that encourage reflection and allow practice-centered inquiry have been shown to be useful strategies for improving instruction. There is evidence that schools using innovative teaching methods are more likely to have a visible mission statement, that is known and understood by all major stakeholders.

Independent Schools

Independent schools are private schools but the words are not synonymous. Independent schools are a type of private school. Private schools can be divided into three groups: Catholic, other religious, and independent (i.e. nonsectarian). There are over 27,000 private schools in America. Approximately 5,853 of those schools are independent which means they are nonsectarian, they are independently governed, nonprofit institutions (Alt & Peter, 2002). They rely only on tuition, donations, and grants for financial support, not on any federal or state funding. Philosophically, independent schools believe in the individuality of the school. They are free to choose and define their mission, to hire faculty and staff, and to admit students in alignment with that mission (Burnett, 2001). Private schools are owned and governed by entities that are independent of any type of local or national government; typically, religious bodies or
2002). School choice, small schools, and decentralized decision making are among the features commonly associated with independent schools.

On average, independent schools have small enrollments, smaller class sizes, and lower student to teacher ratio than public schools. Smaller schools are believed to promote teachers’ commitment to collaborative work and create what Newmann and Wehlage (1995) refers to as “a professional community of learners,” which is important for high student achievement. Fullan (1993) said that teachers must have a moral purpose that is shared throughout the school community in order to have effective education occurring at that school. This commitment to collaborative work among teachers affects the school climate and builds a sense of community and purpose within the school, benefiting all people who belong to the school community.

In his historical review, Chamberlain (1944) gave examples of how independent schools maintained their spirit and prospered during periods of national crisis, such as wars or the Great Depression. Independent schools have exhibited flexibility in adapting to changing conditions in society, giving them permanence in the nation’s educational system. In 1925, the Supreme Court recognized the legitimate right of private schools to be part of the educational system in America. In the case of Pierce v. Society of Sisters (as cited in LaMorte, 2002), the Supreme Court affirmed the role of parochial and private schools in satisfying the Compulsory Education Act. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), in the 1999-2000 school year there were 27,223
Independent schools compared to 92,012 public schools throughout the United States (NCES, 2001). It is estimated that independent schools presently educate 10-12 percent of the school age children.

**Historical Overview of Independent Schools**

For over 350 years, independent schools have remained largely free of government regulation. While most independent schools accept reasonable regulations in matters like attendance and health and public safety, they continue to assert an individual’s right to choose the most appropriate learning environment for their children. During colonial times, all schools were private; mostly funded by tuition paying parents, private donors, and occasionally by townships. These early schools were primarily devoted to the study of religion and Latin; later studies included the classics, science, philosophy, and English. Neither British Royalists nor Federalists interfered with the affairs of these schools (Burnett, 2000). As with independent schools today, these early schools were established to provide special instructional approaches or programs. The first challenge to independent schools came in 1817, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for a state to alter, without consent, the charter of a corporation established for charitable or educational purposes *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*. This was an early victory for those determined to keep independent schools free of governmental interference (Burnett, 2000).
Public schools originally known as "common schools" were started after the Civil War. They were funded by state and local governments and emerged as alternatives to private academies. These public schools sought to address the unevenness in educational opportunity that existed in the country. At the same time, in response to the Protestant-based teaching and philosophy, Catholic and Lutheran schools began to increase. This growth in public and religious private education continued during the last half of the nineteenth century. Private education was challenged twice during the 1920s. In 1923, in *Meyer v. Nebraska*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of schools to determine their own curriculum and in 1925 in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* the right of private schools to exist and operate was upheld (Burnett, 2000).

The last 20 years have brought about many new federal programs and regulations. The relationship between the federal government and independent schools is complex, based on an understanding by the government that independent schools are contributors to the public good and that they have the right to exist and operate independently. Similarly, independent schools recognize the benefits of government programs such as tax-exempt status, the gift tax deduction and assistance in time of crisis through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Burnett, 2000).

As described above, private schools are divided into three types: Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian. During the 1999-2000 school year, 79 percent of all private schools had a religious affiliation (see Table1). Independent schools are located primarily
Table 1

Percentage and number of schools, students, and full-time equivalent teachers in each sector and in each of the private school types: 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
<th>Number:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Private school type</th>
<th>Percentage of all private</th>
<th>Number:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsectarian</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

in central cities (47.4 percent), urban fringe / large town (40.9 percent), and the remaining 11.7 percent are found in small towns or rural areas (see Table 2) (Alt & Peter, 2002).

At the National Education Summit in 2001, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley discussed a plan to reform public education in which he highlighted the following guidelines: increased access to demanding classes, smaller and personalized high schools, connections to caring teachers, and greater parent involvement (NCES, 2001).

Independent schools already provide a model for the guidelines proposed by Secretary Riley. Data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (1988-2000) (as cited in Alt & Peter, 2002) showed that students who had attended private school in eighth grade were twice as likely as their counterparts in public school to have completed a bachelor or higher degree by their mid-20s (52 versus 26 percent). Even students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who had been private school students in 1988 had obtained higher degree levels (Alt & Peter, 2002). When compared to public schools, private schools have smaller enrollments, smaller class sizes, and lower student to teacher ratios on average. Researchers (as cited in Alt & Peter, 2002) like Klonsky (1995), Raywid (1995) and Lee and Smith (1997) suggest that the size of the school is advantageous and possibly leads to higher achievement. This research has found that placing students in small groups fosters a closer working relationship between teachers and students (Lee & Smith, 1995). Smaller school communities lead to higher commitment among members to collaborative work (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). These characteristics of
Table 2

Percentage distribution of schools by community type and level, by sector and private school type: 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector and type</th>
<th>Community type</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Central city</td>
<td>Fringe/ large town</td>
<td>Rural/ small town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>38.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsectarian</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages may not add to 100.0 due to rounding.

independent schools come together to produce sites where learning and relationships between the members are significant and meaningful.

School Climate or Culture

A school's professional climate, in particular the existence of a strong shared purpose among staff members and cooperative interactions among people at the school, is likely to contribute to its effectiveness. As an illustration, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that when teachers feel a sense of community at their schools, they can better communicate consistent goals to students and collaborate more effectively on raising student achievement. Similarly, another study by Bryk and Driscoll (1988) found that teachers who work toward shared goals express higher job satisfaction and have lower absentee rates than do other teachers.

The National Center for Education Statistics (1997) conducted a study comparing public and private schools in 1997. The following conclusions were reached:

In the aggregate, private schools seem to offer a greater sense of community, greater teacher autonomy in the classroom, and more local influence over curriculum and important school policies. In addition, on average, private schools have a climate that would appear to be more conducive to learning, including greater safety and fewer problems caused by students who have poor attitudes towards learning or negative interactions with teachers. (p.31)

According to Barth (2002) a school's culture is very complex. The culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviors, traditions and myths that are deeply ingrained at the
very core of an organization. The culture of a school transmits meaning and is very powerful in shaping what people think and how they act.

Supportive teaching cultures have identifiable characteristics: there is a shared set of values about the importance of teaching; collaboration in the design and implementation of the curriculum; and a sense of community among faculty regarding teaching related issues (Massy, Wilger & Colbeck, 1994). The effectiveness of a curriculum is supported by good teaching practices; good teachers have a direct impact on the quality of education within a school (Glasser, 1992). Yet the current societal expectation that higher standards and teacher accountability will enable all children to learn adds to the frustration that is felt by many teachers today. Accountability and standards are outcomes. It is the process by which those goals are met that must be defined. Knowledgeable and reflective teachers must establish a school culture that perpetuates high levels of learning (Fullan, 1993).

Elements of the school culture include teachers’ sense of shared purpose, collaborative efforts between teachers, the decision making authority of teachers, and an atmosphere of mutual respect among all members of the school community. In a survey taken by the U.S. Department of Education during the 1999-2000 school year, 68 percent of the private school teachers said they had a significant amount of influence on establishing curriculum, compared with 44 percent of public school teachers. Teachers in nonsectarian (independent) schools felt that they had the most influence on establishing
the curriculum (79.4 percent) see (Table 3) (Alt & Peter, 2002). Teachers in independent schools report that they influence what is taught and the instruction used. A study by Bryk and Driscoll (1988) found that teachers who have a shared purpose and goals have higher job satisfaction and lower absentee rates than other teachers.

Mission of Schools

The extent to which teachers share a commitment to the school’s mission and work collaboratively toward the goals of that mission define the culture of the school. Drucker (1992) also made a connection between school culture and mission statement. This case study showed that unless administrators and teachers are committed to a common goal it is incredibly difficult to change the culture of a school. When those beliefs and values arise from an agreed upon mission statement there is an opportunity to create a school culture that will promote learning for all stakeholders. School cultures can vary greatly and are reflective of the school’s core values. When there is a shared purpose and mutual respect among all members a school can effectively educate students.

Currently educators in America are seeking to improve student achievement by restructuring how students are taught. Moses and Whitaker (1990) identified key educational components for restructuring schools. The researchers found that encouraging teachers to build collaborative relationships with each other was a key factor in restructuring a school. They found that initiating school-centered decision making was also a component for restructuring schools. Independent schools have two main decision
Table 3

Percentage of teachers who thought they had a lot of influence on various school policies by sector and private school type: 1999-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector and type</th>
<th>Establishing curriculum</th>
<th>Setting student performance standards</th>
<th>Setting discipline policy</th>
<th>Inservice training content</th>
<th>Evaluating teachers</th>
<th>Hiring full-time teachers</th>
<th>School budget decisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsectarian</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

making groups. The first group is the board of trustees, which focuses on setting policy, hiring and evaluating the head administrator, financing the school, and planning for future generations. Administering the school and making decisions about curriculum and instruction involves the school members directly involved with the students. Establishing and maintaining a positive and collegial school culture makes this type of governance possible.

All schools, public or private, face issues that test their commitment to the mission and the character of their schools. According to Falsey (1989), problems like school violence, race relations, and lack of public confidence in their ability to educate young people have no easy solutions. A mission statement tells where a school stands in terms of its' beliefs and core values. Schools are composed of individuals, such as administrators, faculty, and board members who must make daily decisions that affect the welfare of students and the effectiveness of educational practice. Mission statements focused on learning and reflect the core values of a school. Mission statements can serve as anchors when issues need to be faced and when decisions need to be made.

There is a magnitude of responsibilities that schools and educators have accepted during the last 50 years (Vollmer, 1997). Yet very little research is available to guide educators as they respond to societal changes impacting education. Studies examining the relationship between educational decision making and the mission statement of a school will help educators respond to societal changes. According to Goodlad (1994) a
mission statement provides direction and can be used for strategic planning, helping to weed out unnecessary and time-consuming educational practices. A statement by a character in a well-known story helps explain the value of connecting a mission statement with the decision making process. As the Cheshire Cat in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, "If you don’t know where you’re going, it doesn’t matter which way you go" (p.76). A mission statement gives insight into the priorities of a school, and decisions based on those priorities will help educators respond to the many responsibilities that they are currently being required to assume. This study seeks to understand whether or not making decisions based on a school’s mission statement creates a purposeful community committed to recognizing diverse learning styles and encouraging alternative approaches to learning.

**Definition of Terms**

*Mission Statements*

A mission statement is a set of principles that guide the actions of a group of people making decisions within an organization. The mission statement gives insight into the intentions and priorities of those charged with making decisions about the organization’s future. Mission statements tend to reflect the spirit of the people and the enduring goals of the organization (Falsey, 1989). A mission statement brings a collaborative atmosphere to the school community, which internalizes the mission and makes it operational through the decision making process.
Decision Making Process

The decision making process in an organization often varies according to the leadership skills and core beliefs of the individuals making decisions. Collaborative decision making is a current trend in education. In a 1999-2000 survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, private school teachers were twice as likely as their counterparts in the public sector to feel that they had a role in making decisions that affected the school community (Alt and Peter, 2002). Adherence to a common purpose and goals can focus the decision making process for a school community, making the process more delineated.

The Research Problem

There has always been debate about the value of mission statements. The value of a mission statement is proven only by the track record of the school, when the written word is followed up with action, when philosophy is put into practice. The true test of a mission statement is revealed when there is a crisis or when a major decision about direction must be made. The impact of the mission statement in a school can be seen when questions about curriculum and policy arise. How major stakeholders answer questions about policy and curriculum reveal what value they place on the mission statement. Some believe the mission statement should be general and broad in scope, not a set of specific guidelines. The mission statement reflects how a school wants to portray itself to the public (Pearce, 1994). Others, such as Sergiovanni (1994) discuss how what
people believe and how those beliefs are put into practice to shape school communities. He suggests that as a school community, members should identify the core values and commit to them by writing a mission statement. These core values should undergird all decisions. Teaching styles may vary and teachers may select their own materials but the overarching effect of these core values will be felt and the school will be unified in its educational practices.

It is important to understand which types of decisions are made according to the goals set forth in the mission statement of a school. In order to research the impact of a mission statement on the decision making process, it was necessary to choose a school that had a strong mission statement. Also a small school community allows for members to be involved in the decision making process and increases the likelihood of members being aware of the mission statement. A report issued by the U.S. Department of Education, The Condition of Education 2002, suggests that small and intermediate-sized schools with relatively small classes have advantages, often leading to higher achievement for students. The report finds that teachers can better communicate consistent goals to their students and collaborate more effectively on raising student achievement in small learning environments commonly found in private schools (Alt & Peter, 2002). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2001) shows that private schools had an average enrollment of 193 students in 1999-2000 with an average student to teacher ratio of 13:1. According to a study by Greene (2001),
individual private school students were more likely than those in public schools to be in racially mixed classrooms. For these reasons a small, independent, private school in an urban area was chosen as the site for this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if a mission statement impacts the educational practices of a school community. A small, independent school with a value laden mission statement was studied. Specifically, this ethnographic research determined how the mission statement of The Hudson School, an independent, private school impacts decisions made by administrators, faculty, and members of the Board of Trustees. The Hudson School was chosen because of its reputation in the community of Hoboken, New Jersey. The study examined the decision making process used by administrators, faculty, and members of the Board of Trustees to make decisions about curriculum and policy for the school community. The value of the mission statement in determining direction in the areas of curriculum and policy was explored. The subjects were asked questions about the decision making process and the mission statement. They were asked how the written goals of the mission statement have impacted decisions made within their circle of influence. The collected data was compared across subjects to see whether patterns or themes emerge about the mission statement and the experiences of the subjects during the decision making process.
Significance of the Study

This study demonstrated the relationship between school culture, decision making, and leadership; and how the mission statement of The Hudson School affects each of these areas. Schools, whether they are public or private, may experience difficulty in one or more of these areas, this research showed how a mission statement that is valued and implemented helped this school face changes during its 25 year history. The mission statement acted as the common thread and provided a connection among the areas of institutional culture, decision making, and school leadership.

This study illustrated how leaders use their professional and personal power to promote the mission of the school. At The Hudson School, the founder, who is still the director influences the decision making process both explicitly and implicitly within the school community. Participants in this study took their responsibilities in the areas of curriculum instruction and policy seriously, often showing sensitivity to the school’s mission. In this study, the leadership had a major impact on the perception of the school’s mission and was found to be influential in how the faculty carried out the goals of the mission statement and made decisions. The result of this influence whether attributed directly to the founder / director or to the mission statement, was evident in the school culture which appeared to be fulfilling its understood mission.
Main Research Questions

How has the mission statement of The Hudson School impacted the educational decisions made by the following stakeholders: administrators, faculty and members of the board? What is the importance of mission and how does it affect educational practice?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How do administrators and faculty use the goals of the mission statement to develop and implement curriculum?

2. How do members of the Board of Trustees use the goals of the mission statement to make policy decisions and plan for the future of the school?

Limitations

The researcher focused on one school setting; therefore this study had the following limitations:

1. It only addresses connections between the mission statement and decision making at The Hudson School.

2. It only focuses on the decision making process within this school. The study is not concerned with the efficacy of those educational decisions.

3. The researcher asked only questions about curricular and policy decisions.

4. It focuses on the unique influences of the founder on the implementation of the mission and the direct or indirect impact of her day to day involvement in the school during the past twenty-five years.
5. The Hawthorne Effect, due to the subjects knowing that they are being studied.

Summary

Throughout history the importance of mission statements in education has been debated. In recent times, society has become confused about the mission of education. In order to combat unrealistic expectations, schools often find it necessary to discuss their mission. Since the publication of the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (Bell, 1983) the prominence of mission statements in education has increased. The recent *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) has revitalized interest in educational mission statements and their role in increasing student achievement. The connection between independent schools, their culture and mission is complex, and not easily measured. Most information found in the area of mission statements and decision making consists of anecdotal data rather than empirical research. The literature and lack of research in this area supports the need to study mission statements and their relationships to the decision making process found in educational institutions.
Chapter II

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the related research and literature pertaining to topics associated with the nature of this study. Those topics include mission statements and educational mission statements, the relationship between schools, their mission and society, and decision making within education.

Mission Statements

The increased emphasis on school mission statements began shortly after the release of former U.S. Secretary Bell’s 1983 report, A Nation at Risk. The report spoke about the decline of public education and its implications. This led to an aggressive campaign to incorporate business practices of improving product quality, accountability and assessment which continues today and can be seen in such federal legislation as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This pressure to improve the quality of education has brought many non-academic issues to the table. Non-academic issues like school violence, teacher quality and parental involvement can impede the proper development of a school mission statement (Kagan, 1997). Bailey and Averianova (1999) believe that including non-academic issues in a mission statement causes the school to lose sight of its educational purpose. When non-academic issues are included in a mission statement the school tends to become all things to all people. According to Bonstingl (1992), schools using business philosophy to write mission statements will struggle to identify and
incorporate the needs of their various customers, students, parents, government officials and society.

Philosophies from business have had an impact on educational mission statements. Deming's (1982) philosophy known as Total Quality Management (TQM) has made an impact on the American school system. Practices of Total Quality Management include, top down management, employee training, cascading structure for communication, task forces and external evaluations. This philosophy requires a commitment to quality and requires that the entire school be involved in the process (Walton, 1986). Goodlad (1990) believes that the mission statement should define the school's purpose and list specific responsibilities of its members. Mission statements provide organizations with a useful means of communicating the purposes, goals, and objectives of different groups within the organization or school.

Educational Mission Statements

A review of the literature supports the fact that Deming's (1982) philosophy of TQM is being used by educational organizations throughout the country. It indicates that school districts are written mission statements and long-term vision strategies with the tools of philosophy of TQM (Bonstingl, 1992). Corporate strategies of TQM are being adapted to educational strategies placing the student in the role of primary customer. Secondary customers include parents, extended family, businesses, community members, and other taxpayers. Applying TQM to a school district gives the district a set of ideas of
how to develop and maintain high standards (Herman, 1992). Where TQM philosophy has been adopted the focus on process and results are the bottom line. However, other literature and research suggest that corporate strategies are not easily translated into educational philosophies.

Mission statements are commonplace. However, a review of these statements reveal that they sound very much alike (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). School improvement requires that schools take a serious look at their mission statement to see that they truly explain why they exist, have a clear purpose and reflect a willingness to accept responsibility for achieving that purpose. Regarding the importance of mission statements, Nanus (1992) said, "There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, and achievable vision of the future, widely shared" (p.3). Research on the characteristics of effective schools, led Lezotte (1997) to conclude that a clear and focused mission was essential. That when staff members are committed to the mission, they design and deliver a curriculum that responds to the learning needs of all children. Another characteristic found was willingness on the part of the school to declare that some skills are more important than others. This willingness to abandon less important content areas in order to have enough time for the teaching of essential skills will make the school more effective. Researchers, Purky and Smith (1983) determined those structural variables such as school site management, strong leadership, staff stability, and board
support were necessary for an effective school. They also noted process variables such as collaborative planning, collegial relationships, and sense of community produced an effective school.

In the literature, there is not total agreement about the nature of the mission statement. Pearce (1994) believes that the educational mission statement is an abiding statement of purpose. He suggests that the mission statement be broad with the school’s aim caught within its framework. It must distinguish itself from similar organizations, projecting an image of its self-concept to the public. The mission statement not only provides the school’s philosophy but also the values and priorities of the decision makers. Goodlad (1990) believes that mission statements should mention very few functions. He opposes the broad mission statements proposed by others. He rejects mission statements that are vague because they leave people inside the school and the general public to make up their minds about the school’s philosophy and value. One area where Goodlad and Pearce agree is that mission statements project a public image. Pearce (1994) reflects that mission statements should be written to attract and maintain customers. Quality mission statements are key in keeping a school competitive in the independent school market.

Inspiration for writing a quality mission statement is fueled by having a mission that is shared among all stakeholders. The statement engenders a sense of passion, hope, and motivation (Goodlad, 1994). In her study, Greenlee (1995) documents with her
research that the foundation of a successful school is the establishment of a readily understood mission statement. Research by Stansky (1993) found that mission statements are one of eight core components required to improve school culture. Barth (1993) believes that developing and revisiting a mission statement is like mining gold, because it always derives valuable ideas and insights.

Moses and Whitaker (1990) identified key educational components for restructuring schools. The researchers found that setting a clear school mission and then reorganizing the school to fit that mission was a key factor in restructuring a school. Realigning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to match the mission statement was a necessary second step. They found that mission minded schools enhanced professional development for teachers. In 1999, Thorpe conducted a study to find out to what extent research offices of public and private colleges in the Northeast utilized mission statements to communicate office functions. The functions were identified through content analysis, using the following characteristics: internal reporting, planning support, external reporting, decision making support, assessment support, and policy information support. An email survey was sent to 167 college officials; a response rate of 86 percent was observed. Thorpe (1999) noted the following difference between public and private institutions: a greater presence of assessment-related functions in the mission statements of public institutions. He postulated that the demands for public accountability might explain the presence of assessment-related functions in the mission statements public
institutions while the mission statements of private institutions were more based on theory and process.

According to Anderson (1987), there is a direct connection between the focus of a school and its ability to communicate its goals. Schools intent on reflecting their culture, find their members to be more attentive and responsive to the school's mission statement. Dauber and Epstein (1993) cited a study conducted by Hoover and Dempsy (1987) who found that teacher efficacy and the strength of the mission statement were directly related. They found that teachers, who were more confident about the mission of the school and comfortable within the school culture, established strong relationships within the school community.

There is a broad spectrum of belief as to what a school is supposed to be doing or not doing in society. This societal influence of encompassing too many values may cause educational mission statements to be ineffective. The literature suggests that there is a need for more empirical data to see which types of educational mission statements work and which do not. An example of how the mission statement can drive curriculum and policy is found at the Beaver Country Day School, an independent school in Massachusetts. In 2001, the Board of Trustees agreed to the development of a strategic plan that called for a mission-driven professional development program, drawing from local and national expertise and based on the ideas of Gardner (multiple intelligence) (Visser, 1996), Hirsch (core knowledge) (Mackley, 1999), and Tomlinson (1999)
(differentiated learning). The professional development program caused a school-wide
dynamic to develop, leading Beaver Country Day School to be recognized as a model for
progressive school reform (Gow, 2001). Educators who have developed a common
mental model of core beliefs populate successful schools; together they have created a
shared vision of what constitutes a quality school. Independent schools are mission
driven and free from many of the financial and political constraints that public schools
experience. These schools can be models of good mission statements and practice; their
rich history provides a partial explanation.

Leadership Role

The *No Child Left Behind* (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) has compelled
school leaders to use data about school and student performance when making decisions.
Analysis and discussion of this data assists leaders identify and solve problems in order to
reach external goals, such as those found in NCLB, and internal goals, such as those
found in a school mission statement. Models like Data Driven Decision Making and
School Based Management aid leaders in making appropriate choices. A leader's role in
determining how well a school progresses towards its' goals should not be
underestimated or undervalued. Educational leaders who have a strong sense of purpose
will create an environment in which common goals can be achieved (Northouse, 2001).
An important factor in determining how strongly an educational mission statement
influences the school community is the leadership. According to Bolaños (1999) the key role of an administrator in a successful school is to articulate discrepancies between the current reality of the school and the mission statement. This tension between current reality and the desired goal generates energy and motivation to continuously improve the educational program of a school.

During the early 1980s leaders in public education were criticized for being too bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of students, teachers, and parents. Bureaucracy was securely established in schools during this time and leaders replied on their position to motivate teachers. Since the early 1980s educational leaders have moved toward a more democratic and participatory type of leadership. According to Sullivan and Glanz (2000) innovative ideas such as site-based management, peer coaching, reflective practice, and teacher self-evaluation have expanded participatory democracy in schools. Growing awareness of how leaders influence the implementation of a school’s core values or mission statement has affected relationships among members of the community. When leaders stress collaboration, the school’s mission statement is more likely to be successfully implemented.

Leaders have a special responsibility to share the mission of the school with those in the school community. Unlike other organizational leaders, school leaders can not carry out the school’s mission using their position to command it, or using their personalities to sell the mission. School leadership should be aimed at motivating
teachers, students, and parents to assume their responsibilities in fulfilling the shared
purposes of the school (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Schools, Mission Statements and Society

A school's educational mission statement has always been connected to the needs
and wants of society. Kagan (1997) reports that schools, which are formally charged
with educating children, are now becoming partners in society's agenda. This may have
started with complaints from the business community or pressures from parents, but
either way it has led to an increase in the practice of involving various segments of
society in the decision making process. The expectations of parents about what schools
can accomplish are increasing. This influences educational policymaking. School board
members bring with them the dominant values of the local community. This links the
school board and the community in an informal power structure. The attitudes, values,
and role expectations of the community become part of the school. This linkage causes
school policies, prior to being put into effect to be reviewed by members of the
community and their reaction to the proposed policies considered (Thompson, 1976). A
study by McCracken (1994) indicates that the school and the community must understand
that school improvement will only occur when there is a shared perception of what is
important in education. This shared understanding underlines the importance of creating
a uniformly understood and accepted mission statement.
Public schools in the 70s and 80s were ready for a change due in part to their poor efforts, little standardization, poor achievement, and weak expectations. Bunday (1998) suggests that independent schools fare better educationally because they have fewer layers of bureaucracy and therefore have more flexibility in their programs. He also suggests that because of a national move to standardization, independent schools are better able to meet the basic security needs of teachers. Teachers are better satisfied in the private sector because of the freedom to implement various strategies to increase student performance. The current standardization movement in American society has led critics of the public school system to assert that bureaucracy undermines the creativity of teachers and the belief that all children can learn. It is against the backdrop of standardization in the public sector that independent schools serve as models of innovation in education. Critics believe that independent schools show greater gains in student achievement because they have greater freedom from regulation. This is especially true of independent schools with mission statements that have incorporated core values and are flexible enough to generate continuous improvement in the educational program of the school.

The literature suggests that societal changes during the last thirty years have influenced schools and their educational mission. A review of the literature indicates that mission statements are embedded in the research about core beliefs, school culture, decision making, communication, and society.
Decision Making and Mission

Decision making theory asserts that a person or group examines a set of given alternatives and understands the consequences of each alternative before making a choice. Ideally, decisionmakers will choose alternatives that match personal and corporate values, goals, and objectives. Theorists in the fields of psychology, social sciences, and economy have attempted to explain the complex behavior of decision making. Decision making theories abound, and much has been written about the application of these theories by educational administrators in schools. This study focussed on how the study population at The Hudson School made decisions and if they based those decisions on the written mission statement. This study focussed only on the used of the mission statement in making curriculum and policy decisions by individuals in the study population. This study did not examine the decision making process used by The Hudson School, but sought only to determine the influence of the mission statement on the decision making process of those interviewed. Therefore the literature review was limited to those studies which concentrated on a possible link between decision making and mission statements. Many organizations have written and adopted decision making policies which are usually based on available resources and organizational values (Drucker, 1992). Educational settings may require a different approach to decision making. According to (Sergiovanni, 1996) schools should not import theories from other organizations because school decisions should be based on what is good for students in a
particular setting, and what is effective for the academic, social, and moral development of children.

Reaching consensus in any organization or group is difficult. In education, because of its plurality nature, it is a constant challenge. The literature shows the decision making process is often conflicted unless there is a specific structure or framework in place. According to Chan (1988) decision making should be based on a vision that all the members of an organization share. Not only should the members of the organization share the same vision, they should also have the opportunity to establish the goals and objectives to meet that vision. Once the goals are collaboratively established the members should have time to meet and develop strategies for achieving those goals (Simerly, 1991). Anderson (1983) conducted a longitudinal study that sampled 93 colleges. Anderson reported that when he compared his new data to data taken 10 years earlier, there had been a drop of 20 percentage points in the number of faculty members who believed that their colleges used a collaborative decision making process.

Researchers, Drummond and Reitsch (1995) found that when college faculty felt empowered through the decision making process, attitudes improved and this in turn led to better outcomes in terms of productivity and collegial relationships.

In the business world, Deming (1982) asserted that organizations that include employees in the decision making and goal development have higher overall performance and job satisfaction. As previously noted in the literature review, Deming's TQM
philosophy has impacted the educational mission statements of many public schools throughout the country. During the past 50 years, Deming and others have concluded that in environments where there is meaningful input into the decision making process there is success. This meaningful inclusion in the decision making process allows organizations to respond swiftly to changing external pressures (Pearce, 1994).

Most literature that exists provides anecdotal rather than empirical research. Most studies occurred during the early 1980s and focussed on improving student achievement by adopting successful business practices. This researcher speculates that the release of former U.S. Secretary Bell’s 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* was instrumental in stimulating research in the area of school structure and decision making. This may serve as a further indication that the body of research about educational mission statements and decision making needs to be increased.

**Summary**

The main body of literature and research exists during the 1980s and 1990s. It appears that interest about the relationship between decision making and mission statements began around the time that the report, *A Nation at Risk* (Bell, 1983) was released. The recent focus on standardization and testing may have slowed research in this area. The most salient points of the literature review indicates that, while there are different opinions about what an effective mission statement should contain, there is agreement about the importance of developing one within organizations. Literature
supports the concept that organizations such as schools should remain faithful to the task of educating students and resist external pressure to correct societal problems.

The literature review of educational mission statements indicates that teachers are a vital link in the effectiveness of the curriculum; they are responsible for communicating the core values held by members of the school community. Despite different teaching styles, and curriculum choices, it is the teachers’ commitment to the school’s core values, which integrates mission and decision making.

Review of literature concerning schools, mission statements, and society suggests school cultures vary greatly, and they are reflective of the school and influence school restructuring. The literature reveals that school cultures that establish educational boundaries through their mission statements are able to effectively communicate their goals to the community.

Most research in the area of decision making and mission has been done in the area of business. The Total Quality Management philosophy espoused by Deming (1982) calls on organizations to make a commitment to producing quality products and services. There is no doubt that TQM has influenced education and that schools will continue to look at business procedures for innovative ideas. Educational mission statements can be used to undergird the decision making process and provide identity and purpose for a school community.
Chapter III

SUBJECTS, DATA COLLECTION / PROCEDURES, AND DATA ANALYSIS

Subjects

During The Hudson School’s 25 year history, students have been involved in community service projects throughout the city and are known for the theatrical productions that they produce and perform twice a year. Faculty participants for this study were chosen from a list of employees employed on or before September 1, 1999. This ensured that the participants had an understanding of the school culture and had knowledge of the school’s mission and how decisions were made in accordance with the mission statement. Board members who participated in the study were chosen at random and since the board has no term limits, and therefore the lengths of service varied greatly. An important aspect of this study is the omnipresence of the school director during the 25 year history of The Hudson School. The current school director is also the founder of the school and participates in all Board of Trustees meetings. Her influence on the implementation of the mission and the direct or indirect impact of her day to day involvement in the school was a key factor in this study. This researcher felt that her influence should be considered a control variable in the study.

The subjects in this study were not chosen randomly. All subjects are affiliated with The Hudson School, an urban, independent school in Hoboken, New Jersey. The researcher chose this school because of its reputation in the community. Faculty
participants for this study were chosen from a list of employees employed on or before
September 1, 1999. This ensured that the participants had an understanding of the school
culture and had knowledge of the school’s mission and how decisions were made in
accordance with the mission statement. Board members who participated in the study
were chosen at random and since the board has no term limits their length of service
varied greatly. An important aspect of this study is the omnipresence of the school
director during the 25 year history of The Hudson School. The researcher considered the
day by day involvement of the current school director as founder of the school and
participant in all Board of Trustees meetings to be a control variable in the study.

This study dealt with the relationship between the understood mission of the
school and decisions that are made regarding curriculum, instruction, and policy, all
subjects had to have had experience with developing and implementing curriculum. In
addition, since it takes time for an individual to adapt to a new school culture and to
understand the mission of the school, a minimum of three years of employment at The
Hudson School was necessary. From the list of employees employed on or before
September 1, 1999, it was determined that 5 of the 16 employees had actually developed
or had been involved in major curricular decisions during their tenure with The Hudson
School. Demographics of the subjects are provided in the following tables. Table 4
presents faculty and Table 5 presents Board of Trustee members. Years refer to how long
the subject has been affiliated with The Hudson School.
Table 4

*Faculty*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee One</th>
<th>Interviewee Two</th>
<th>Interviewee Three</th>
<th>Interviewee Four</th>
<th>Interviewee Five</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>23 years</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree: M.A.</td>
<td>Highest Degree: M.S.</td>
<td>Highest Degree: M.A.</td>
<td>Highest Degree: B.A.</td>
<td>Highest Degree: M.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Board of Trustees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee Six</th>
<th>Interviewee Seven</th>
<th>Interviewee Eight</th>
<th>Interviewee Nine</th>
<th>Interviewee Ten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>25 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation: College Professor</td>
<td>Occupation: Project Manager, Construction</td>
<td>Occupation: Operations Manager, Theater</td>
<td>Occupation: Financial Director</td>
<td>Occupation: School Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Brief History of Hoboken*

Squeezed into a little more than a square mile of land on the Hudson River and directly across from Manhattan, the City of Hoboken had a population of 38,577 people in the year 2000. Not long after its founding in the early 1800s, Hoboken became a major shipping port. It also served as a point of departure for troops during World Wars II and II. Ships continued to be built and repaired here until the mid-1980s. Hoboken
remained a busy waterfront until the advent of large container ships in 1964. Small warehouses and the lack of open space in the port prevented Hoboken from accommodating these large container ships. Thus, during the 1970s the piers fell into ruin and Hoboken faced a severe economic decline that reached its lowest point at the end of the decade. During this unsettled time, The Hudson School was founded. Throughout the 1980s, artists and young professionals found Hoboken an affordable alternative to living in Manhattan. During the 1980s and 1990s, the real estate market continued to grow and new construction continued unabated.

*Brief History of The Hudson School*

In Hoboken, 23 percent of the student population attend private schools as compared to the national average of 10-12 percent (Hudson School Information, 2002). The Hudson School is a non-profit corporation; the school has been approved by the New Jersey State Board of Education, is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools. In 1978, a group of concerned educators and parents in Hoboken initiated what they intended to be a modest experimental project to help the local school district improve its curriculum.

The Hudson School was founded in 1978 with 18 students and six teachers, with financial assistance from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. The educational mission of the school was and is to maximize the learning potential of each student. The Hudson
School is a school open to all children who have a “passion for learning.” (Hudson School Information, 2002). Starting with grades 6, 7 and 8; the school added a grade each year until there were students in grades 5 through 8. By 1993, grades 9 through 11 had been added, and presently there are a total of 190 students enrolled in grades 5 through 12. In November of 2002, after 24 years of living on year-to-year leases, The Hudson School moved into its first brand-new permanent building.

The Hudson School provides scholarships and works with organizations such as A Better Chance and New Jersey SEEDS (Scholars, Educators, Excellence, Dedication, Success) to provide fully paid tuition for nearly 35 percent of the student body. These resources allow The Hudson School to attract students regardless of their socio-economic status. Students at The Hudson School reflect a wide variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds.

The mission statement of The Hudson School is written in narrative form (see Appendix E). There are three major goals: (a) To recognize diverse learning styles and to encourage alternative approaches to learning; (b) to successfully prepare students to meet the challenges of adulthood, by developing an ability to get along with others within the community, an ability to express their ideas effectively and to place those ideas within their proper social, cultural, or scientific context and to develop a sense of self-confidence and self-respect; and (c) to help students develop the qualities of courage, compassion and commitment. The Hudson School considers courage, compassion and
commitment to be the overarching goal of its mission statement. This motto is the
subtitle of the mission statement and is found on all school publications.

Curriculum and instruction at The Hudson School reflects the social and
economic changes that have occurred in Hoboken during the past 25 years. With its
unique history and geographic location, The Hudson School has had the opportunity to
continuously develop and refine its curricula to meet the needs of its students.

Data Collection / Procedures

This ethnographic study focused on the behaviors of the decision-makers within
the school by interviewing them in their natural setting, the school. Through this
ethnographic study, the researcher was able to gain an understanding of the beliefs and
core values held by those who make decisions about educational practice at the school
(Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). In order to solicit volunteers, the subjects were given time to
consider their participation and to ask questions about the study. Potential subjects were
asked if they willingly agreed to participate in this study whether they would sign an
informed consent letter. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the subjects were told,
verbally and within the written consent form that they could withdraw at any time
without penalty.

The researcher received a letter of permission to conduct research from the Board
of Trustees (see Appendix A). A letter of solicitation (see Appendix B) explained the
study; and the letter of consent (see Appendix C) was attached and given to each
participant. A list of questions for the interviews can be found in Appendix D. These questions acted as a guideline and were modified to fit the needs of each interviewee.

When it appeared that answers were drifting from the guiding questions of this study, the researcher refocused the interviewee by referring to this sheet. Each participant was assigned a number for identification purposes.

Data Analysis

A qualitative software program, Atlas.ti v.4.1 (1997) was used to help the researcher find phrases in the transcribed interviews, interpret their meaning, and analyze the relationship between educational decision making and the mission statement of the school. The software program helped the researcher quantify the number of similar responses among the subjects and observe the patterns that existed within the data. The researcher defined a series of coding categories after rereading the transcribed interviews several times (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher assessed and analyzed the data by identifying common characteristics within each interview. Similar language and certain phrases were evident and the researcher assigned a code for each one. In Chapter V, after assessing the data, this researcher describes the pattern of decision making used by The Hudson School to address the goals stated within their mission statement.

Summary

The demographics of the subjects in this study manifest diverse backgrounds and educational experiences. Their understanding of the mission of the school and how that
mission impacts on their curricular and policy decisions was recorded, transcribed, and
analyzed. During the interviews a set of questions served as a guide but often the
interviewees related additional experiences and opinions that enriched the study. The
interviews provided the researcher with data that described the relationship between
decision making, leadership, school culture, and the mission of The Hudson School.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this educational ethnographic study was to determine if the values found in the mission statement of The Hudson School serve as a basis for the decision making behavior of the faculty, administrators and board members. This chapter contains the findings of this study in aggregate form, showing the consistencies in the responses collected from interviews conducted with ten members of the study population. Unique perspectives of individuals within the study population were also identified.

This researcher categorized data according to relevant terms used by the interviewee to describe the mission statement, decision making, or the school culture. Several events, such as the building being completed after 15 years and decisions about scholarships and admissions policy, are included in the analysis because they reflect the culture of the group. The analysis of data in an ethnographic study often requires the use of the participants' own words to convey what it is to work and make decisions within that culture (Creswell, 1998). According to Wolcott (1994) it is difficult and perhaps undesirable to analyze data in a purely objective manner. He recommends that the researcher strive for "rigorous subjectivity." The researcher should present the analysis and interpretation of the data in a fair and balanced manner (Wolcott, 1994). This researcher has written the findings of this study using the methods proposed by Creswell and Wolcott.
Coding

The researcher created 32 codes by rereading the interview transcripts and assigning qualitative adjectives to describe the interviewee’s statements. The objective of this coding was to organize data into patterns. There were common codes across the 10 interviews as well as some divergent perspectives that were unique to individual participants. The two codes used most often were Founder effect and Direction. These codes reflect the data supplied by the interviewees when asked to identify how the mission statement was revealed to the school community.

The code Founder effect was used to describe the impact of the current leader and founder of the school. When describing how decisions were made at the school, participants described the founder in the following ways: “We have our own little mission divining rod sitting right there.” And “Ultimately the founder is where I turn to make sure the decisions we are making are within the mission statement.” The second descriptor was coded as direction. Direction described the mission statement as directly or indirectly informing decisions. Participants described the decision making process and mission statement in the following manner: “The mission statement remains in the back of all of our minds when making a decision.” And “We come back to the mission statement both directly and indirectly (to make decisions).” This is an example of a unique code, which was given the descriptor unexplainable. Unexplainable refers to the idea that the mission of a school is taken for granted because it is not easy to put into
words. This did not appear to be a widely held belief about written mission statements among the subjects.

Within-Case Analyses

Interviewee One

Interviewee one described how the connection between the mission statement and curricular decision making was most evident in the school culture. In interview one, the relationship between the codes *creative freedom*, *collaborative*, and *school culture* was found three times. These three variables appeared to be linked throughout the interview.

*School culture* was also linked to *mission* once, as was *creative freedom*. The code, *positive curricular decisions* was embedded in the variables, *mission* and *creative freedom*. The reasoning can be seen in the following quote: "I think that for the most part the administration looks to hire people who embody the mission. And then in turn, when they are in the classroom or developing curriculum, it's a reflection of who they are." Researchers Hoover and Dempsey (1987) found that teacher efficacy and the strength of the mission statement were directly related. They found that teachers who were more confident about the mission of the school and comfortable within the school culture established strong relationships within the school community (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Based on further analysis, it appears that this individual's understanding of the mission statement and her relationship with colleagues led to positive curricular decisions at The Hudson School.
There was one instance of the embedding of the codes *overreaching* and *frustration* in the code of *mission*. The relationship between these variables can be seen in the following statement: "I just think the mission statement is too broad to focus on as a school and as an educator. You know that if your goal is too huge, you don't relax and find direction. And even though the goals are wonderful, the school could be a little more focused."

The quotations listed in Table 6 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

**Table 6**

**Selected Responses of Interviewee One**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction —</td>
<td>&quot;I love the kids; I think they are incredibly bright. I visit very often with my colleagues. I have some tremendous colleagues. They are open to talking about ideas, sharing ideas, and supporting one another.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of School's Mission —</td>
<td>&quot;I don't know if I saw a mission statement before I started teaching here. I know that the whole environment speaks to the mission statement and I knew that the second I walked in. I know that the mission statement is a little bit unruly. There are a lot of ideas in it—respect for the individual, respect for one's creativity, respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 (continued)

Assessment of the Role of the Mission Statement at the School—

Current Status of Goals Within the Mission Statement—

for where someone is and how are you going to bring them to the next level; honoring their ideas.”

“Every part of it is understandable and I respect every part of it. I just think it’s too broad to focus on as a school and as an educator. You know that if your goal is too huge, you don’t relax and find direction. And even though the goals are wonderful, the school could be a little more focused.”

“Regarding curriculum: I think people will toss it out there, sharing examples but as a faculty it goes back to the freedom, perhaps too much freedom, that it is the individual choice of the teacher whether or not to reach this goal. Also I think there is no flexibility in the daily schedule. There’s not much room to address different learning styles.

Regarding student character: In order to shape character students need to feel there is structure. I don’t feel that this is happening in the school. I think we are sending the wrong message. For some kids it’s fine to not have structure because they already have that strength of character. But for others the inconsistencies of rules I think sends a subversive message which is, “if you can get away with it—try to get away with it” and I don’t think that’s character.”
Table 6 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Mission Statement on Instructional Decision Making—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflection on the Current Mission Statement and possible change—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that for the most part the administration looks to hire people who embody the mission. And then in turn, when they are in the classroom or developing curriculum, it’s a reflection of who they are. Therefore if the right person is chosen the mission is embodied in them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think that for the most part the administration looks to hire people who embody the mission. And then in turn, when they are in the classroom or developing curriculum, it’s a reflection of who they are. Therefore if the right person is chosen the mission is embodied in them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee one thought that the students were incredibly bright and were willing to work hard. She thought that she had some tremendous colleagues who were open to sharing ideas and supporting one another. She described the environment as open because of the way people treat each other. She said, “There is tremendous respect and support for who you are as an individual and you can feel that.” Concerning the mission, she stated that “the whole environment speaks to the mission statement and I knew
that—the second I walked in.” Due to this description of the environment, the researcher coded this variable as *intangibles*.

She spoke of “freedom” at the school, she said, “I think there is a great degree of freedom, which is good and bad, but I can appreciate it.” When I asked her to explain what she meant by degree of freedom; this was her response:

Well, for example when I came I was told I would teach 7th and 8th grade. I had no experience, but a master’s degree in teaching but no teaching experience at that grade level and I was given absolutely no direction. So I ran with it because I was really excited about putting my master’s into practice. And I was trained how to develop curriculum but if someone comes in without any background...So freedom is both good and bad.

The researcher observed what interviewee one described as good freedom and bad freedom while at the school. The freedom that allows for creativity and positive interactions between individuals was coded, *creative freedom*. This code allowed the designing and implementing of curriculum according to the tenets of the mission statement to continue unimpeded. Making decisions without consciously considering the mission statement was how the researcher described this other type of freedom. These decisions are usually based on one’s own judgement or experience and the researcher coded them as *choice*. Of course it should be noted that neither code speaks directly to good or bad freedom as the interviewee described them. The codes were simply used to describe the differences the effect that freedom can have when making decisions about curriculum.
Interviewee Two

Interviewee two described how the connection between the variables of competency and direction. In interview two, twice the code competency was embedded in the code direction. The relationship between appreciation, positive curricular decisions, and competency was found two times. In each case competency was embedded in the two variables of appreciation, and positive curricular decisions. Creative freedom was also linked to appreciation, positive curricular decisions, and competency once. The code for founder effect was found embedded four times during the interview. Founder effect was embedded in school culture, negative effect, overarching and choice. The embedding of this code in various variables shows the influential power of a leader and for the presence to felt in different situations and at different times (Northouse, 2001).

This interviewee expressed the code appreciation, which was embedded along with the codes founder effect and frustration. All three of these variables were embedded in the code choice. The diversity of these codes can be seen in the following quote by interviewee two:

In terms of curriculum, I would have to say that half of the school is really excellent and about half of the school is not recognizing diverse learning styles and encouraging alternative approaches. About half and half, and it looks to me like the right people were hired or they weren't. And either people are willing to move or they aren't somehow given the right education to move. In terms of community, I think it's excellent, I really do. I just can't... and in terms of character, I think we go a very far way to being successful. Just more work on commitment and follow through....really—responsibility.
Interviewee two also had two variables, which the researcher coded as *collaborative* and *competency* embedded in the code *direction*.

The quotations listed in the Table 7 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

**Table 7**

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Two*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction—</td>
<td>“I enjoy being in a community that is really vibrant, intellectual and has student centered teachers. I really enjoy the freedom to create a curriculum.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of School’s Mission—</td>
<td>“I can’t say that I have read it more than four times total in the time I’ve been here so I can’t say that it has directly affected me at all...but in so much as it is a clear expression of the founder’s philosophy, and she is the benevolent dictator of the school – it permeates—it does – to a certain extent.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of the Role of the Mission Statement at the School—</td>
<td>“Not all teachers understand the mission statement and I also think there is some conflict with it. I think there is a mission statement, but then on the other hand, there’s a sense that the ideal school is a very old European style school. I think there is a sense that if we only hire college professors who have a real passion for what they are doing, the kids will rise to that level.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee two believed that the new building has had an impact on the collaborative nature of the faculty. The physical set up of the building is quite different from the building where the school was formerly located. She feels that the new location does not lend itself to the interdependent environment that she experienced at the other

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7 (continued)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Status of Goals Within the Mission Statement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Impact of Mission Statement on Instructional Decision Making</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection on the Current Mission Statement and possible change</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;We teach them to be decent human beings who value other human beings who are considerate, who by and large respect and care about others. I think we do that very, very well and I'm proud of that. I think a lot of parents would say this school is a real fit for my child, my child is safe here. I think it takes a lot of courage to take the kinds of creative risks these kids take, I think they really do. They develop a lot of compassion for each other.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;In terms of curriculum, I would have to say that half of the school is really excellent and about half of the school is not recognizing diverse learning styles and encouraging alternative approaches. About half and half, and it looks to me like the right people were hired or they weren't.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The problem is it's not followed through on enough, but I really love what it says. Its there, but not something that's brought to our attention.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
location. She expressed feelings of isolation and hopes that after they have been in the building for a year that feeling will disappear. When asked about the school she replied, "I enjoy being in a community that is really vibrant, intellectual and has student centered teachers. I really enjoy the freedom to create a curriculum." She expressed a concern for the issue of teacher development saying, "The ones (new teachers) who develop as great teachers are the ones who really enjoy the interaction with other teachers and learning from other teachers. And they visit each other's classrooms and learn from each other."

The researcher links this concern with the earlier expression about the impact of the new building on teacher collaboration.

Concerning the mission, she stated, "Not all teachers understand the mission statement and I also think there is some conflict with it. I think there is a mission statement, but then on the other hand, there's a sense that the ideal school is a very old European style school. I think there is a sense that if we only hire college professors who have a real passion for what they are doing, the kids will rise to that level." Without understanding the mission statement or worse yet, being in conflict teachers could not be an effective part of the school culture, negatively impacting curricular decision making.

Interviewee Three

Interviewee three described the connection between the variables, choice, creative freedom and positive curricular decisions. The code choice was identified five times in the interview. Another code, appreciation was embedded in the code, choice two times.
Creative freedom was a code used three times to describe what interviewee three said.

The importance of choice and creative freedom can be found in the following statement:

"there is some academic freedom to design curriculum to teach the way you like to teach. Time to find out how to teach and to find out what topics you want to include. There is also freedom to make changes in your daily schedule. If I feel that there is an important issue I can make a change, it's my decision and so I have a lot of authority and that creativity and freedom is wonderful."  It appears that the variables of choice and creative freedom play a role in the decisions made by interviewee three.

The variable school culture appeared twice in the statements made by the interviewee. Embedded in school culture was the code intangibles in this code, the codes for appreciation, and competency was embedded. Interviewee three stated, "The biggest mission statement has been—I didn’t need to read it when I came to the school. What I realized right away was that I had a lot of power to do what I thought was important."  The code interpretation was used for Interviewee three's statement about mission statements. His statement was "The mission statement is open, you could build on it, and there is room for interpretation. A mission statement, I guess is a foundation from where you build a house, what it will look like—who knows? Something to fall back on. I don't know what it should be."

The quotations listed in the Table 8 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.
Table 8

Selected Responses of Interviewee Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction—</td>
<td>&quot;I think the most important thing is that there is some academic freedom to design curriculum to teach the way you like to teach. Time to find out how to teach and to find out what topics you want to include. There is also freedom to make changes in your daily schedule. If I feel that there is an important issue I can make a change, it's my decision and so I have a lot of authority and that creativity and freedom is wonderful.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of School’s Mission—</td>
<td>&quot;For me the biggest mission statement has been—I didn’t need to read it when I came to the school. What I realized right away was that I had a lot of power to do what I thought was important. I think that is very important for job satisfaction.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of the Role of the Mission Statement at the School—</td>
<td>&quot;I think that the school has an open structure in terms of designing curriculum and running things. When I came there was very little in so I had to start from scratch in some ways I was very lucky. I like that. Everything that is happening I have had some say in it. There wasn’t too much administrative structure. In some ways that is annoying as in consequences for student behavior and everyday things but it is developing. Sometimes I have too much&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 (continued)

| Current Status of Goals Within the Mission Statement— | responsibility in dealing with students. There is not a lot written down.” |
| Impact of Mission Statement on Instructional Decision Making— | “I think we do that in our curriculum, the faculty is aware of how important it is for students to express themselves. If the students we choose... if this is the right school for a student I think they will grow to be self-confident. So the community question becomes how we accept students. I think that sometimes we choose students incorrectly. Ability to get along with others in the community is an ambitious statement to make. We do parenting to some extent; this is the hardest goal of all. We don’t have enough staff to deal with the social aspects.” |
| Reflection on the Current Mission Statement and possible change— | “Our mission statement came after the school created itself. I think our school has grown because of the academic freedom or freedom to create curriculum and teaching the way you see as being important has shaped our mission statement. In other words, it came from within the school instead of being given to the school from the outside. The process has generated the mission statement.” |
| | “The mission statement is open, you could build on it, and there is room for interpretation. A mission statement, I guess is a foundation from where you build a house, what it will look like—who knows? Something to fall back on. I don’t know what it should be.” |
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee three enjoys the freedom to make daily decisions about his teaching without interference. He describes teaching at The Hudson School as “very different” from his other teaching experiences. About his experience he says, “One school I was at was old and strict in its ways instead of a creative teacher I was too much a teacher doing whatever I was told to do. That didn’t fit my philosophy, the salary was good but it wasn’t satisfying. In another school the school had problems with the board, it was unclear as to who had authority in the school; it was always an administrative mess. The relationship between teachers, administration and board were unclear. Here I don’t feel interfered with; I feel supported most of the time. I feel I have great influence in what I do.” The idea of influence and empowerment came up several times during the interview. He describes how he knew right away that at The Hudson School he had a lot of power to do what he thought was important. Interviewee three described the school as having an open structure in terms of designing curriculum and running things.

Interviewee three was not overly aware of the school’s written mission statement. His view of it’s origin was also unique, he said, “Our mission statement came after the school created itself. I think our school has grown because of the academic freedom or freedom to create curriculum and teaching the way you see as being important has shaped our mission statement.” When the researcher asked him to explain this further, he said, “It has come with experience and time. I like that it’s through trial and error, experience.
I think that’s the best mission statement. I mean you could argue that there is no idealism here—shouldn’t we have started with the idealism first but when you start a school some of those ideals are obvious without stating them.” At the end of the interview, the researcher revisited the concept of a mission statement. The interviewee stated, “A mission statement, I guess is a foundation from where you build a house, what it will look like—who knows? Something to fall back on. I don’t know what it should be.”

Interviewee Four

Interviewee four described the decision making process using a variable which was coded positive curricular decisions. This variable appeared four times and was linked with the following variables: competency, mission, school culture, founder effect, and direction. In one instance the code, positive curricular decisions was embedded in both the school culture code and the founder effect code. In another instance the code competency was embedded in the code positive curricular decisions. This can be seen in the following statement by interviewee four. He said, “We have been encouraged to deal with as best we can the diversity in the classroom. I have tried to incorporate a multisensory approach in my teaching. I do emphasis visual, oral and tactile skills in doing that I have been successful on national standardized tests.”

Two times the codes for founder effect and mission appeared together. Once, the code for direction was embedded in both founder effect and mission. Another time the variable, coded intangibles was embedded in both founder effect and mission. An
example of the linkage between founder effect, mission, direction, and intangibles can be found in one of the interviewee's remarks. The interviewee said, "You could know what the school was about just by talking to the director, even for a short time. This is her school, and these are her ideas and we all have rallied around them over the years."

The quotations listed in the Table 9 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

Table 9

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Four*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction—</td>
<td>&quot;Well, The Hudson School has an intimate atmosphere where you get to know the students well. It's a big benefit to me as a teacher. This is largely because of the size and partly because of the teacher that this happens. This is a good place to be if you want to get to know students well.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of School's Mission—</td>
<td>&quot;I think it was when we first started to develop it. I don't know when that was exactly. If one existed before that I was just unaware of it. So it is possible that one existed without me knowing it. You could know what the school was about just by talking to the director, even for a short time. This is her school, and these are her ideas and we all have rallied around them over the years. But I think I was aware of what type of school we had&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
very soon after I started teaching here. I believe the first written mission statement I remember seeing was when we first became accredited. Before that we had done some thinking about who we are, and what our identity is and how we felt about education and learning.”

“It is rather vaguely worded. Every mission statement I have ever read has been vague. It’s very broad, I don’t know how specific you can be in a mission statement. You want to include everything because the more specific you make it the exclusive you become.”

“I think that because of the size of the school, our kids are forced to socialize with each other. I think this is a strength and the faculty works towards that goal in own individual ways. We talk about the atmosphere of the school and the betterment of the school quite frequently. The part of character that is emphasized most at this school is compassion. The faculty is willing to help students and students are willing to help each other. We are concerned about the well being of everyone inside and outside the school.”

“Very often we have small classes to accommodate student needs or an interest, that’s big part of what we are about. Kids tend not to fall through the cracks here as they can in larger schools. I know almost all the parents of my students. Beyond that we offer a strong academic curriculum, yet we have the ability to deal with all types of students. The curriculum
Table 9 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection on the Current Mission Statement and possible change—</th>
<th>in most disciplines is open-ended in that they can take courses at their ability level.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I don’t feel qualified to say how I would change the mission statement without further research.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee four finds The Hudson School to be a unique place where he can really get to know the students and where there is individualized instruction. He said, “I think individualized learning—the emphasis on the individual is foremost here. Very often we have small classes to accommodate student needs or an interest, that’s big part of what we are about.” He described the atmosphere as one he enjoyed saying, “The Hudson School has an intimate atmosphere where you get to know the students well. It’s a big benefit to me as a teacher. This is largely because of the size and partly because of the teacher that this happens. This is a good place to be if you want to get to know students well.” He was appreciative of the school culture and believes that good curriculum decisions occur because of the mission and history of the school.

Interviewee four made a statement that echoed a concept found in the literature review. When speaking about the value of a mission statement he said, “I think what’s necessary is sitting around and deciding what should in the mission statement. I don’t think the statement itself is. The process is far more important than the product. I think
the benefit comes from asking who do we think we are, what we are doing and are we doing what we think we are doing.” This agrees with Barth (1993) who believes that developing and revisiting a mission statement is like mining gold, because it always derives valuable ideas and insights. The researcher asked the interviewee who the audience of the mission statement was. He responded, “For everyone. I think it’s for us primarily because we need to remind ourselves where we are going.”

*Interviewee Five*

Interviewee five’s description of the curricular decision making process was embedded with the codes for interpretation and frustration. The code, *interpretation* appeared four times and the code, *frustration* also appeared four times. Twice these codes, *interpretation* and *frustration*, were embedded with the code, *negative curricular decisions*. In one instance, frustration was embedded in the code, *direction*. Once the code, *interpretation* was identified with two variables, *mission* and *school culture*. When asked about reaching goals the interviewee stated, “I think that it’s piecemeal, in some situations the faculty spends a lot of time making sure that happens. I don’t think everyone is working on it though. It may be a by-product of how certain people relate within the school.”

The quotations listed in the Table 10 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.
### Selected Responses of Interviewee Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Satisfaction—</td>
<td>“I enjoy that it’s not quite so regular, in that you have a lot of freedom to make your own curriculum and the cooperation between teachers. Lots of flexibility in terms of curriculum and instruction.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of School’s Mission—</td>
<td>“I don’t recall, it’s interesting, I don’t remember reading it before I was hired. It was not at the interview and during my first few years here I was looking at how the school was operating to inform my decisions about I should be doing. I adapted to what I saw going on around me. I was not in touch with the mission statement until I had been in the school three or four years. I remember a long mission statement being read once at the beginning of the school year, it was hard to process all at once. We did discuss it and people made comments on what we were doing. We were looking to see if we fit that statement. Now we have a shorter version, which is a work in progress, it was never finalized. The accreditation team required one.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of the Role of the Mission Statement at the School—</td>
<td>“We develop curriculum in terms of concrete things you, as a teacher should be doing. It is so general that teachers can pick and choose. There is no intentional recognition of students various learning styles. We do discuss how to teach...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interview five enjoys working at the school but would like to see it be more attuned to the mission statement. She said, "You have a lot of freedom to make your own curriculum and the cooperation between teachers. Lots of flexibility in terms of curriculum and instruction." Also she felt strongly about the history and mission of the
school. She would like to see more importance given to the mission statement of the school and for it to be used regularly in guiding curriculum and instruction decisions.

Interviewee five said, “We should be a group of people who are aligned by that mission statement. We are not; I don’t think people read it and some might not even agree with it.” This creates a tension between doing what she feels is right and what is going on around her.

She thought that the mission statement should be revisited. She believes it should be rewritten and presented to all members of the school community. She thought there should be more accountability at the school for both teachers and students. She believes that the decision making process is impacted by the lack of adherence to the mission statement. Interviewee five would like to work collaboratively to make the mission statement more predominant in the school community.

*Interviewee Six*

In this interview, the interviewee expressed the idea that a mission statement is a picture of what the school is; it is a product having meaning for the public. He said, “I find it very hard to get my hand around mission statements. I have one at work and it doesn’t have any impact on my life, none whatsoever. I think they’re very nice to have, put them on a wall somewhere and then you go to work.” The researcher gave this variable the code, *portrait view*. *Portrait view* appeared five times in the data. The code, *portrait view* was embedded in the code, *negative policy decisions* twice. Twice, *portrait view* was embedded with the code, *indifference*. Referring to the mission statement, he
said, "When you write one you don't sit down and say what you want it to be but we already know what it is. Every time I have been involved in a mission statement that is the way it comes about." Interviewee say the mission statement as a "marketing tool" to the community at large, leading the researcher to create the code, outer rim.

The code, positive policy decisions was found embedded in the code, direction. Also embedded in the "direction "variable were the codes, facility effect and founder effect. This is evidenced from a statement made by interviewee six, he said, "The board has provided a stable environment of a quality so that the mission statement can be addressed. The building has fueled a lot of interest in the school. But I don't think a building is all that important to a school like The Hudson School but many people see the building and it attracts them to the school." Another time the code, positive policy decisions was embedded in the code, school culture.

The quotations listed in the Table 11 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

Table 11

Selected Responses of Interviewee Six
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Board—</td>
<td>“Basically we are an advisory board. The operational side which has to do with approving the budget, keeping an eye on the budget and staying in its bounds. Then there’s the role of trying to understand things like enrollment trends, how we shape the school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Mission—</td>
<td>“I don’t remember what is in the mission statement. I don’t remember the wording of it at all. I know there is something about a student-oriented program.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making Process—</td>
<td>“We don’t play a very significant role in the decision making process. Financial, the building, and achieving full enrollment. None have a direct bearing on the mission statement. Challenges are associated with the private school market place. Having a school that reflects the mission statement helps us in a competitive market. Most decisions are made on practical considerations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling Conflict—</td>
<td>“I’d say the board works by consensus building more than anything else. Rarely are there split decision votes. Much of what happens is information processing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Mission Informs Policy</td>
<td>“Those involved in the school have a visceral understanding of what the place is about and you wouldn’t make practical decisions that are counter to the mission. At The Hudson School everyone is so inculcated with what the school is all about, making a decision counter to the mission statement is not an issue.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee six saw the board as both advisory and operational. He felt that the board worked well together and that the director bore most of the burden for implementing the mission statement. About the role of the board, interviewee six said, "I think our role is to provide any tools you might need to carry out the mission statement. The most recent example is the building. The board has provided a stable environment of a quality so that the mission statement can be addressed." He felt that the most important thing the board did was to provide a stable environment, even though he thought that the board provided a very supportive environment for the students and the board secures that in an indirect way.

When asked about decision making he felt that the people involved had a visceral understanding of what the school was about and therefore they wouldn't make decisions, which would go counter to the mission. He said, "The (mission) statement is helpful to someone who is a total stranger to the school. But those involved in the school have a visceral understanding of what the place is about and you wouldn't make practical decisions, which are counter to the mission."

*Interviewee Seven*

Interviewee seven’s description of the decision making process most often fell within the codes of founder effect and positive policy decisions. The code, *founder effect* was found three times within the data. While the code, *positive policy decisions* was
found three times in the data. In one instance they appeared together, *founder effect* was embedded along with the code, *choice* within the variable, *positive policy decisions*.

The quotations listed in the Table 12 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

**Table 12**

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Seven*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of the Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Board—</td>
<td>“To guide the school in policy decisions through consensus. Lately we have been involved in the new building. This took a lot of time and planning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Mission—</td>
<td>“I have read the mission statement. I have seen it developed over the years. I know we didn’t have one fifteen years ago. Or if we did I never saw it. I remember when it was revised we had an opportunity to read the draft and give our input.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Decision Making Process—      | “An example would be scholarships. We decided by looking at past practice, reality of the budget, the feelings of the board and__. Her ideal of what scholarships should be, where she thought we should be going so that she could continue to live by what the mission statement is. I believe she understands it, she’s my guiding light in this whole thing and I wouldn’t be involved if it wasn’t for her. The school wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for her, her strength, and desire. Ultimately that’s where I turn to make sure the decisions we are making
Table 12 (continued)

Handling Conflict—

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Mission Informs Policy Decisions—</th>
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</table>

are within the mission statement.”

“Fortunately, we have never had a conflict in which the principles of the mission statement were challenged. Usually the issues we deal with are practical decisions, about how the school needs to be run, the budget, etc. There has never been a challenge to the mission statement. Very often everyone really gives up to____. We all respect her to the extent that if there’s a real discussion, and nobody knows the answer, she becomes the guiding voice. She is so committed to the mission statement that you don’t waiver from it. There has never really been an issue that came up within the board that I believe would go against the mission statement.”

“If there is a budget decision we don’t go back and read the mission statement before we comment on it. If there’s a decision about the building we don’t re-read the mission statement.”

The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee seven was very enthusiastic about the school, the founder and the new building. He felt that the board mostly deals with practical issues and that the mission statement “indirectly informs” the decisions made by the board. Interviewee seven said, “I think like many things it’s written its read and then put on a shelf. We don’t look back on it. If there is a budget decision we don’t go back and read the mission statement before we comment on it. If there’s a decision about the building we don’t re-
read the mission statement. At the same time though it's important to say we worked on it and it remains in the back of all of our minds when making a decision. Probably many of us wouldn't feel the same way about the school if we didn't have a mission statement. So somewhere subconsciously, it does exist, it's something you agree to but are not always referring back to."

When asked about the decision making process, the interviewee felt that the board make policy decisions through consensus. He said, "We decided by looking at past practice, reality of the budget, the feelings of the board and _____. Her ideal of what scholarships should be, where she thought we should be going so that she could continue to live by what the mission statement is. I believe she understands it, she's my guiding light in this whole thing and I wouldn't be involved if it wasn't for her. The school wouldn't be here if it wasn't for her, her strength, and desire. Ultimately that's where I turn to make sure the decisions we are making are within the mission statement." This statement reemphasized the influence of the founding director, both in the school and on the board.

Interviewee Eight

Interviewee eight described what she saw as a distinction between mission and mission statement. She said, "There is a difference between what the mission is and what the mission statement says. They are not unrelated but a mission statement by definition is a very broad statement to allow movement in and around it. So when you say, for
example, to provide a love of learning, that is an intentionally broad statement. The mission statement doesn’t talk very much about how you do that. The unspoken thing that we are all aware of in the founding of the school is the idea that students should have the opportunity to get a good education not withstanding their financial situation.” The researcher coded this variable, distinction; this variable appeared twice in the interview.

Both times the code, positive curricular decisions was embedded and once the code, positive policy decisions was embedded with it. Four times the variable coded, direction was found, once it was embedded within distinction. Twice the code, positive policy decisions was embedded in the variable, coded as direction.

The code, positive policy decisions was embedded four times in other variables. Those variables were direction, school culture, collaborative and founder effect. It appears that there is a linkage between those variables, which is supported by a statement that interviewee eight made. She said, “we are all very aware of trying to provide a progressive, classical education to serve the community to broaden what we think of as community and to provide education for students who otherwise would not be able to pay for education.”

The quotations listed in the Table 13 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.
**Table 13**

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Eight*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of the Interview</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Board—</td>
<td>“I don’t know. I know if our role is any different from other boards; oversight and governance. We also serve as a place to bounce ideas off of for_____.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Mission—</td>
<td>“There is a difference between what the mission is and what the mission statement says. They are not unrelated but a mission statement by definition is a very broad statement to allow movement in and around it. So when you say, for example, to provide a love of learning, that is an intentionally broad statement. The mission statement doesn’t talk very much about how you do that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making Process—</td>
<td>“Amazingly enough we follow our meeting agenda. When the items come up we come in prepared to discuss it. I think everyone feels they are in a safe place to discuss differences of opinion. I can think of very few times when there was a division on the board. Everyone takes part and then we try to come to a consensus decision.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling Conflict—</td>
<td>“The role of the board is to make sure the administration has the means to provide the things of the mission and to check up to see that it’s happening. The board is responsible for making sure it all happens. Nothing counter to the mission should happen. In this case we have less concern with accountability because we have a founder still in charge of the school.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Mission Informs Policy Decisions—</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| "I think we often will say, does this fit in with what we want to do, which is another way of saying, does this meet the mission. Whether it's building a new building or allocating money for new lights, these are all mission related things. You never want to make precedent by doing something that takes away from the mission."

The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee eight described the mission of the school as an expression of everything that guides you in running a school. She included curriculum and learning in her discussion of board policy. When asked about how she thought board policy affected the overarching goal of The Hudson School, she said, "I do think they are translated to the students through the overarching culture of the school and through what they learn in the classroom. All of our policy decisions have to fit with that atmosphere. It's a holistic approach here." Interviewee eight saw the mission statement as a marketing tool. She clearly described what she saw as the difference between mission and mission statement. She said, "The mission statement is a marketing tool. The mission itself is not for outsiders, it really is for guiding the culture of the school, for guiding curricular decisions, raising tuition, and so forth. You have to think like if we raise tuition are we still within our mission. But the mission statement itself has to express what is going on at the school."
When asked about the decision making process, interviewee eight responded by including the goals of the mission statement in her response. She said, "The mission statement is an expression of everything that guides you in running an institution. It contains some goals and in a less direct way informs how you would reach those goals. The role of the board is to make sure the administration has the means to provide the things of the mission and to check up to see that it's happening. The board is responsible for making sure it all happens. Nothing counter to the mission should happen."

*Interviewee Nine*

Interviewee nine's description was most often embedded with the variable of mission. The code, *mission* was found seven times in the interview. Three times positive policy decisions was embedded within the code *mission*. This can been seen in a statement by interviewee nine, he said, "From time to time on critical issues the mission statement has come up. It is certainly not something we talk about at most meetings but when we are discussing things like scholarships, financial aid assistance. We find ourselves coming back to what our role is and we look at the mission statement." The code, *historical perspective* is also found embedded in either the code *mission* or *positive policy decisions* three times.

Interviewee nine had one instance where the codes *positive policy decisions* and *historical perspective* were embedded in the code *direction*. Also in that instance interviewee nine made a statement. He said, "If we look at the mission statement as a
moral purpose by which we live, then we will not make compromises when it comes to
the mission of the school.” This led the researcher to create the code, *paramount*.

The quotations listed in the Table 14 show how the participant felt about each of
the key elements in the interview.

Table 14

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Nine*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of the Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Board—</td>
<td>“Primary function is to ensure the mission and ultimately we are responsible for everything that happens. As a practical matter, it means we oversee the administration of the school and the director reports to us. We set the budget and tuition and all major strategic moves are imitated or approved by the board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness of Mission—</td>
<td>“To paraphrase, it is to provide a first rate education for intellectually curious children in a way that develops them to the fullest of their abilities regardless of their background.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision Making Process—</td>
<td>“I think we provide the support mechanism for the faculty and administration to do that. The board knows that these are very important things for ____ and they are reflected in the way she hires faculty members and chooses students. She chooses people who can work with this program.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Handling Conflict—            | “We do come back to the mission statement both directly and indirectly. We say, wait a
minute what is our goal and I can’t remember how many discussions where it was mentioned. For example, an issue came up about all the seats at the school had not been filled; we knew that we had applicants to fill these seats. But we couldn’t just fill the seats with any applicant because it would have compromised the mission of the school and its integrity. We have never backed down on it and periodically we have to remind ourselves that it is what we are all about and that we would rather take a financial hit that to compromise the integrity of the admissions process. The mission statement is important because if it wasn’t there it would be easy just to fill the seats.”

“I would say from time to time on critical issues the mission statement has come up. It is certainly not something we talk about at most meetings but when we are discussing things like scholarships, financial aid assistance. We find ourselves coming back to what our role is and we look at the mission statement. For example, years ago this question came up, geographically, who are the students we should be helping and there was a board member who asked, is it our mission to help a child from Ghana who wants to come to The Hudson School. Does that fit within the mission or not and I think on some examination we determined that yes it does fit within the mission; we are not restricted to just local children. We often talk about how we do not want to compromise the academic caliber of the school just to balance the budget. Nothing we do should be counter to the mission statement.”
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee nine conveyed very strong feelings about the school and its mission. Early in the interview he used an example to illustrate this point. He said, "Years ago this question came up, geographically, who are the students we should be helping and there was a board member who asked, is it our mission to help a child from Ghana who wants to come to The Hudson School. Does that fit within the mission or not and I think on some examination we determined that yes it does fit within the mission; we are not restricted to just local children. We often talk about how we do not want to compromise the academic caliber of the school just to balance the budget."

When asked about the decision making process. Interviewee nine gave an example of how the decision was made relative to the mission statement. He said, "An issue came up about all the seats at the school had not been filled; we knew that we had applicants to fill these seats. But we couldn't just fill the seats with any applicant because it would have compromised the mission of the school and its integrity. We have never backed down on it and periodically we have to remind ourselves that it is what we are all about and that we would rather take a financial hit than compromise the integrity of the admissions process. The mission statement is important because if it weren't there it would be easy just to fill the seats. If we look at the mission statement as a moral purpose by which we live then we will not make compromise when it comes to the mission of the school."
Interviewee Ten

Interviewee ten's description had the code, *historical perspective* embedded throughout the interview. The code, *historical perspective* appeared six times; this was embedded with the following codes: *collaborative, outer rim, mission, founder effect, and future thought*. The codes, *mission* and *founder effect* were embedded twice in *historical perspective*; all other codes were only embedded once. There was only one instance of the code *school culture*, which had the code *mission* embedded in it. A unique code to this individual had to be developed to describe the following statement by the interviewee: "I take it (the mission statement) for granted and the school would be what it is if that wasn't our mission. Anyone who comes here for more than 5 minutes senses it. It's the way I live life. It's so much a given to me." This led the researcher to create the code, *unexplainable* for this variable.

The quotations listed in the Table 15 show how the participant felt about each of the key elements in the interview.

Table 15

*Selected Responses of Interviewee Ten*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements of the Interview:</th>
<th>Responses of the Interviewee:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Role of the Board—</td>
<td>&quot;I am the educator. I come to the board meetings to report on what is happening at the school. When I come to board meetings I am there to report on how things are going. I am very respectful and thankful for the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Table 15 (continued) | expertise of the board members. They make sure we are fiscally responsible.”

“For me it’s intuitive. I look at the written words and say, yeah, that’s close enough. I never have spent an inordinate amount of time trying to say it. To say it in three or four sentences is terribly difficult. It’s your philosophy; it’s your way of life. The mission statement is the philosophy; it’s the people you hire, the way you treat others. The motto (courage, commitment and compassion) is close enough to what the philosophy is.”

“If there is something that would impinge on the mission of the school or the day-to-day operation of then they make decisions. They are respectful of me, they don’t micromanage. I’ve enjoyed the respect of the board members and I give them my respect.”

“There was a deficit and a suggestion came up to reduce financial aid. I simply restated my mission; I did not want that to be the way we handled our financial difficulties. It would have impacted the mission of the school. Other board members also felt that it would change the character of the school. That discussion didn’t last for more than one board meeting.”

“It should be happening for the whole community, it makes it possible for the faculty to do their job. In our mission statement everything we do has a purpose because we try to hire people who are passionate specific fields.” |

| Awareness of Mission— |  |
| Decision Making Process— |  |
| Handling Conflict— |  |
| How Mission Informs Policy Decisions— |  |
The analysis of this transcribed interview contributed the following information to this study. Interviewee ten has a unique role because she is both an administrator in the school and a board member. When asked how she bridges those roles, she responded, “I am the educator. I come to the board meetings to report on what is happening at the school. When I come to board meetings I am there to report on how things are going. I am very respectful and thankful for the expertise of the board members. They make sure we are fiscally responsible. If there is something that would impinge on the mission of the school or the day-to-day operation of it then they make decisions.”

When asked about the decision making process, interviewee ten recalled a time when there was a deficit and a suggestion was made to reduce student financial aid. The interviewee described her input and how the board made the decision. She said, “I simply restated my mission; I did not want that to be the way we handled our financial difficulties. It would have impacted the mission of the school. Other board members also felt that it would change the character of the school. That discussion didn’t last for more than one board meeting.”

Summary

The researcher has identified three patterns that reflect the culture of the study group. Among the ten interviews, the following three patterns about the subjects’ experiences within the school community have emerged: (a) The interviewees are
mission sensitive; (b) They rely on the founder as a guide for helping them make
decisions; and (c) They find their work important and meaningful.

While individual viewpoints and experiences differ there appears to be consensus
among the subjects. They agree that the mission statement informs their decisions yet the
director / founder is the primary interpreter of the school’s mission statement, in many
cases making the final decision. At first this appears to be a conflict between what the
subjects say about the importance of the mission statement and how they act when
making decisions. However upon closer examination, this researcher thinks that the
history of the school and the nature of independent schools play a part in explaining this
conflict in their statements. During the 25 years of the school’s existence, the founder
has worked tirelessly to promote the school and that explains why she is respected and
appreciated among the subjects. Independent schools are autonomous and exist free of
public pressure but recognize that they need support from the community to survive. The
leader of The Hudson School understands this delicate balance and perhaps this is why
she continues to influence decision making both directly and indirectly through her
presence.
Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

This ethnographic study determined how the administrators, faculty and members of the Board of Trustees employ the mission statement of The Hudson School to make decisions about curriculum and policy for the school community. The purpose of this study was to compare the interview data among the 10 subjects to learn about the value of the mission statement for determining direction in the areas of curriculum and policy appeared to be important.

Interpretation of Interviews

Interviews with the faculty revealed that the leadership had a major impact on the perception of the school's mission and was found to be influential in how the faculty carried out the goals of the mission statement and made decisions. It appeared that the most likely source for this continuation of the mission is the presence of the founder, who still fills the role of school director. Influential leaders transform followers through vision setting and role modeling. Northouse (2001) revealed that in organizational leadership there are two types of power: position power and personal power. Personal power is when a leader acts in a way that is important to the followers, when the leader acts as a good role model. Northouse suggested that personal power is based on relationships. There are benefits for both leaders and followers when together they work towards common goals like those found in a mission statement. The director / founder of The
Hudson School demonstrates how personal power can influence the decisions of those responsible for determining curricular and policy changes.

Data from the interviews appears to support what Goodlad (1990) believes about mission statements. He opposes the broad mission statements and rejects mission statements that are vague because they leave people inside the school and the general public to make up their minds about the school's philosophy and value. When this type of frustration occurs, there is a definite impact on the ability of individuals to make curricular decisions. The mission statement of The Hudson School contains specific goals, and in general the statement served to inform community members about the school's mission. All members of this study population were aware of the mission statement and could paraphrase its major points. They also related that the culture of the school revealed the school's mission; one could "sense" it, they said, after being in the school for only a short time.

In terms of decision making, the members of the faculty and board of trustees did not appear to be mission driven. Yet, they are mission sensitive and in the case of the faculty appear to be committed to using the mission statement to guide instruction. At The Hudson School, faculty member interviewees expressed a commitment to the school's mission and desire to work collaboratively toward the curricular and instructional goals of the mission. The collaborative work in the area of making curriculum decisions was not evidenced in this study. At least three of the five
interviewees expressed frustration with the level of collaborative decision making in the area of curriculum and instruction. It appears from this research that the desire to work collaboratively represents a high level of individual commitment to the mission of The Hudson School. According to Bolaños (1999) this tension between current reality and the desired goal generates an energy and motivation to continuously improve the educational program of a school. This research determined that relief of this expressed frustration by promoting more collaborative decision making would lead to a better educational program at the school.

Interviewees from the faculty revealed that the founder, who is still the director, influences the decision making process both explicitly and implicitly within the school community. Participants in this study took their responsibilities in the areas of curriculum instruction and policy seriously, often showing sensitivity to the school's mission. Views expressed by the subjects in the area of decision making support the literature found in Chapter II. Researchers, Drummond and Reitsch (1995) found that when a faculty member felt empowered through the decision making process, attitudes improved and this in turn led to better outcomes in terms of productivity and collegial relationships. With the proper encouragement and support this type of empowerment described by Drummond and Reitsch could have positive results among the faculty of The Hudson School. From the interviews it appears that board members expect faculty and administrators to make decisions about the educational practices at the school. This
agrees with Deming's (1982) TQM philosophy, which asserted that organizations that include employees in the decision making and goal development have higher overall performance and job satisfaction.

The Board of Trustees is supportive of the school director and faculty. They view themselves as financially responsible for the building and by extension maintaining a quality educational program. The board did not feel responsible for meeting the goals of the mission statement; in their view, that job belonged to the faculty and administration.

Because they are not educators they rely heavily on the expertise and opinion of the school director when making decisions. They did not believe that the board was responsible for carrying out the goals of the mission statement; they felt that was job of the faculty and administration. Most members expressed their individual and collective commitment to not "compromising" the mission statement. When asked, the interviewees often remarked that their decisions were in line with the mission of the school, which as previously noted is directly and indirectly influenced by the school director. The members reported that when making decisions the mission statement is not directly referred to during their discussions. Four of five board interviewees felt it was important to have input from the director before making a decision. As noted previously, the interviewees expressed a respect for the director and trust her ability to hire individuals who will move the mission of the school forward.
All interviewees from the board described the mission statement in terms of a reflection of the school’s identity; this is referred to as the *portrait view* in the coding.

This view may limit the board’s ability to fully support the faculty in their endeavors to carry out the mission statement. Since they rely heavily on the director to carry out the school’s mission, the data suggests that future transition to a new director may be difficult. When asked to describe future challenges, interviewee nine said, “Little by little we need to phase the director out; she has always done a lot of jobs at the school. During the past few years, she has given up some of those jobs and we will continue to push that. It’s important to the school to gradually have other people take on the functions that she has done. I think that this will provide a seamless transition when she is ready to leave.” This suggests that the board is aware of the *Founder effect* and the personal power of the director.

The researcher noted a particular difference between the interviewees who were faculty and those who were board members. In general faculty members saw the mission statement as a document to guide and direct the school. Goodlad (1994) who feels that a mission statement should provide direction, and be used in planning supports this view in the literature. The board members saw the mission statement as a reflection of the school, not necessarily a guide to be consulted when making decisions. In the literature, Pearce (1994) who believes that the mission statement reflects how a school wants to portray itself to the public supports this view. This researcher notes that despite the
different views held by school community members that it did not affect the collaborative
decision making process used sporadically by both sub groups. According to Falsey
(1989) mission statements can serve as anchors when issues need to be faced and when
decisions need to be made. For both the board members and the faculty interviewees the
mission statement was valued and undergirded their decisions and actions.

Subsidiary Questions Addressed

The first subsidiary question was specifically directed to faculty with the intention
of examining how the goals of the mission statement were evident in the curriculum and
instruction. Interviewees were asked questions dealing with three areas within the
mission statement. Interviewees were asked to evaluate how well they thought The
Hudson School was progressing towards the goals written in the mission statement.
These main goals are as follows: (a) Curriculum—To recognize diverse learning styles
and to encourage alternative approaches to learning; (b) Community—To successfully
prepare students to meet the challenges of adulthood, by developing; An ability to get
along with others within the community, an ability to express their ideas effectively and
to place those ideas within their proper social, cultural, or scientific context, a sense of
self-confidence and self-respect, and (c) Character—To help students develop the
qualities of courage, compassion and commitment. This is the motto of The Hudson
School, and is the overarching goal of the mission statement. Table 16 shows responses
from each interviewee in each areas of the mission statement. Summaries of the
comments appear in Table 16.

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Curriculum Goal</th>
<th>Community Goal</th>
<th>Character Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee One</td>
<td>“I feel that we have teachers going in and assessing learning styles and doing an amazing job at it. It varies from teacher to teacher.”</td>
<td>“The advisory groups, adults involved in what’s going on in the community. Because we are small and the teacher has such close contact with all members of the community, this goal is met.”</td>
<td>“We address character in the curriculum, this seems logical. In order to shape character, students need to feel there is structure. I don’t feel that this is happening in the school. I think we are sending the wrong message. For some kids it’s fine to not have structure because they already have that strength of character but for others the inconsistencies of rules I think sends a subversive message which is, “if you can get away with it—try to get away with it” and I don’t think that’s character.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee Two</td>
<td>“As a school, I think we fail in that. I don’t think we rise to that very often. I’d say that there’re individual teachers who are outstanding and I”</td>
<td>“If you include the self-confidence and self-respect, which I associate with a community, I think we excel to a great degree. I think kids come out of The Hudson School decent human beings. I”</td>
<td>“I think it does. I think it does, but I think the staff is so large it’s not always communicated well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee Three</td>
<td>don’t think there’s any real support for other teachers to evolve that way, and I don’t know what that support should look like. It doesn’t help to have someone come in and give a two hour workshop. It just doesn’t.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Yes we do but on the other hand teachers have teaching styles and they don’t always match the learning styles of students. I would like to add that when I teach I try to make my students as teacher independent as possible. In America students are very teacher dependent and I try to push them in the opposite direction so they are less dependent on how the teacher teaches.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think we do that very, very well and I’m proud of that. I think a lot of parents would say this school is a real fit for my child, my child is safe here. I think it takes a lot of courage to take the kinds of creative risks these kids take. I think they really do. They develop a lot of compassion for each other.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Most of this comes from home. This is a very ambitious goal. It deals with moral issues and I have students who have not changed one bit in this area. The goal is individual, family, and neighborhood based more than school based. I don’t have anything in place to address this. This goal falls on teachers and the types of teachers who are hired have a lot to do with this. Teachers set examples. It’s good to have a statement like that but it’s up to the staff and depends on their philosophy or core values.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee Four</td>
<td>I think it individual. We have some faculty who are more interested in content.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I think that it’s piecemeal, in some situations the faculty spends a lot of time making sure that happens. I don’t think every one is working on it though. It may be a by-product of how certain people relate within the school.”</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Creative, chaotic, it’s not a respectful community. There are a few people who set a good example and others who set a bad example. I would say that we’re not doing a good job in this area. There needs to be follow through.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee Five</td>
<td>“Over the years with the director’s encouragement we as a staff have become aware that there are different learning styles and students learn under different conditions. We have been encouraged to deal with as best we can the diversity in the classroom. I have tried to incorporate a multi-sensory approach in my teaching. I do emphasis visual, oral and tactile skills in doing that I have been successful on national standardized tests.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Our students meet at grade level meetings and are involved in community service. This helps nurture a positive school and community atmosphere. I think that because of the size of the school, our kids are forced to socialize with each other. I think this is a strength and the faculty works towards that goal in own individual ways. We talk about the atmosphere of the school and the betterment of the school quite frequently.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“A lofty goal. The part of character that is emphasized most at this school is compassion. The faculty is willing to help students and students are willing to help each other. We are concerned about the well being of everyone inside and outside the school.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the area of curriculum, faculty interviewees felt that most teachers are meeting the curriculum goal as it is stated in the mission statement. However, the interviewees felt that some teachers needed more help in the area of curriculum and in understanding the importance of how their own teaching style affects student learning. Faculty interviewees made suggestions that the staff needs to receive more training in the areas of curriculum and instruction. In the second area, community, the faculty interviewees felt that the advisory program was a great benefit, helping the adults in the community stay in touch with the students and allowing for early intervention with problems. In the third area, character, the faculty interviewees felt that teachers need to set the example and that some teachers fall short in this area. Some felt that the faculty is willing to improve and believe training would help.

The faculty interviews revealed that teachers support the mission statement but felt that all teachers were not carrying it out. They expressed a desire to improve that situation and suggested training in the areas of differentiated instruction and learning styles. Faculty interviewees also requested improved communication and felt that their role in implementing curricular decisions should be preceded by their involvement in collaboratively setting instructional goals.
Recommendations for The Hudson School

The researcher proposes the following strategies to assist members of this school community successfully work towards fulfilling the school’s mission.

1. Faculty members are given an opportunity to express their views about the school, how well they are meeting current goals and planning for the future. Since the school has recently moved into their first permanent home, this could be beneficial to everyone.

2. A committee of major stakeholders within the school community revisit the mission statement and using a collaborative decision making model analyze the content and intent of the statement.

3. The Board of Trustees should determine the decision making changes that they want to occur when the school is ready to look for a new director.

Now that the building has been finished, The Board of Trustees can turn their attention to developing a leadership plan. This plan would assist them in transferring some of the decision making power to others in the school community. A timeline should be developed and followed.

Recommendations for Further Research

There has always been debate about the value of educational mission statements. It is important to understand how an organization like a school will make important policy and curriculum decisions. Beyond the financial and political constraints, it is
necessary to understand the motivating factors and criteria a school uses to make

decisions. Accordingly, this researcher offers the following recommendations for further

research:

1. It is recommended that a longitudinal study of a school be done to see if
decision making process changes over time.

2. It is recommended that a study investigate the decision making changes that
occur in a school when a new director replaces the original founder.

3. It is recommended that a comparison of public, parochial and private school
mission statements be done.

4. It is recommended that the connection between school culture and mission be
examined.

5. It is recommended that the effectiveness of schools with a mission statement
that define the school’s purpose and list specific responsibilities of its members be
explored.

Summary

At any level of education teachers are a vital link in the effectiveness of the
curriculum; they are responsible for communicating the core values held by members of
the school community. Despite different teaching styles, and curriculum choices, it is the
teachers’ commitment to the school’s core values, which integrates mission and decision
making. A review of the data indicates that at The Hudson School, teachers were
committed to the school's core values and allowed the mission statement to shape their curricula decisions.

After reviewing the data, this researcher found that there was a relationship among the areas of institutional culture, decision making and school leadership. Further examination of the data reveals that the mission statement was the common thread which held the areas together creating a vibrant learning community. Participants in this study understood and accepted the mission statement. They expressed how the current founder / director of the school has influenced decisions and how those decisions have reflected the mission of the school. The mission was evident in the school culture, the decision making process, and in the leadership suggesting that mission does influence educational practice when the mission statement is valued and implemented.
References


Permission to Conduct Research
January 9, 2003

Deborah Krause
209 Zabriskie St.
Jersey City, New Jersey
Fax # (973) 669-1260

Dear Ms. Krause:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of The Hudson School, I am happy to grant you permission to use The Hudson School as a subject for your doctoral research. I understand that you intend to conduct interviews with members of the current administration, faculty, and board members to gain insight into how the mission statement impacts the school's academic decisions.

We look forward to reading your paper and seeing what conclusions you draw from your study.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Samuel Reckford
President
Board of Trustees
Solicitation Letter
Dear Sir or Madam:

Identification
I am a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

Purpose of Research
I am conducting research to find out how the mission statement of The Hudson School has impacted the educational decisions made by administrators, faculty and members of the Board of Trustees.

Procedures
I would like to ask you to be part of this research by answering questions (see attached questions). A free flowing discussion will take place regarding these questions. The interview should take approximately an hour to complete and will be held at The Hudson School. With your permission, I am requesting that your responses be audio-taped. You have the right to review all or any portion of the tape and request that it be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature
Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary.

Anonymity
Your anonymity will be protected. Information provided by you will be handled with strictest of confidentiality.

Securing Information
All information, audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in my home. All transcripts and tapes will be destroyed 3 years after the final document is written.

Statement of Review
This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research (IRB). The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services at (973) 275-2974.

My mentor, Dr. Ruzicka, or I are available to answer any questions you might have about the research. Dr. Ruzicka can be reached at (973) 275-2723. I can be reached at (973) 669-5301 ext.285 or email, debkrause@comcast.net

If you wish to participate please sign the attached Informed Consent Form and return to me within one week of receiving this letter. Thank you for your time and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Krause
Interview Informed Consent Form
Interview Informed Consent Form

Researcher’s Affiliation

I understand that by participating in this interview that I am voluntarily participating in research conducted by Deborah L. Krause, a Doctoral Candidate at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

Purpose of Study and Duration

The purpose of the study is to find out how the mission statement of The Hudson School has impacted the educational decisions made by administrators, faculty and members of the Board of Trustees. I realize that this interview will take approximately an hour to complete.

Description of Procedures

I understand that I will be asked questions about the topic and I have reviewed the attached sample of guiding questions. I understand that my responses will be audio-taped and that I have the right to review all or any portion of the tape and ask it to be destroyed.

Statement of Voluntary Nature

My participation in this interview is completely voluntary. I understand that my refusal to participate does not involve any penalty or loss of benefit to which I am entitled. There are no expected benefits from my involvement. I may discontinue at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Anonymity

My anonymity will be preserved. Coding of the interview data will be done at no time will the identity of the interviewee be revealed. Master lists, data, and transcripts will be locked in a cabinet, accessible only to the researcher.

Confidentiality

Information will be gathered through individual interviews, which will be kept strictly confidential. The confidentiality of the data will be kept by coding of the interview data, at no time will the identity of the interviewee be revealed. Master lists, data, and transcripts will be locked in a cabinet, accessible only to the researcher and her dissertation committee.

Risks

I anticipate no risks or discomfort by my participation in this research.
Benefits

I expect no benefits to come from my participation in this research.

Questions

If I any questions about the research I can contact either the researcher, Deborah Krause or her mentor at Seton Hall University, Dr. Ruzicka. Dr. Ruzicka can be reached at (973) 275-2723 and Deborah Krause can be reached at (973) 669-5301 ext.285 or by email, debkrause@comcast.net

Audio-Taping of Interview

I understand that my responses will be audio-taped and that I have the right to review all or any portion of the tape and ask it to be destroyed. All audio-tapes will be destroyed three years after the final report is written.

Statement Regarding this Form

I will receive a copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent Form.

Statement

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. The IRB believes that the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject’s privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights. The chairperson of the IRB may be reached through the Office of Grants and Research Services. The telephone number of the office is (973) 275-2974.

I have read the material above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this interview, realizing that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

________________________    ________________________
Subject’s Signature          Date
Guiding Questions
Curricular Decisions

1. How often is the mission statement referred to at meetings or during discussions with other faculty members?

2. Describe the curriculum writing process at The Hudson School. Where do the ideas for new or revised courses originate?

3. When a course is written or revised, how do you incorporate the goals of the mission statement (see list)?

4. According to the mission statement, The Hudson School “recognizes diverse learning styles”. How do you identify the different learning styles of students?

5. According to the mission statement, The Hudson School “encourages alternative approaches to learning”. How do you adapt your lessons to meet those different learning styles?

6. Describe some activities you use in the classroom to help students develop “an ability to express their ideas effectively and to place those ideas within their proper social, cultural, or scientific context.”

7. How have the curriculum and the pedagogy used in your class helped students develop the qualities of courage, compassion and commitment found in the overarching goal of the mission statement?

8. From your perspective, how has the mission statement affected the development and delivery of instruction at The Hudson School?
Guiding Questions for
Members of the Board of Trustees

Policy Decisions

1. How often does the board revisit the mission statement? When was the last time it was revised?

2. Describe the decision-making process used by the Board of Trustees.

3. When making decisions regarding educational policy, how does the board resolve conflict? What role does the mission statement play in these decisions?

4. Describe three major challenges that The Hudson School is currently facing. Do you believe that the mission statement will help the board address these challenges? If so, how?

5. How have the educational policies developed by the board helped students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and commitment found in the overarching goal of the mission statement?

6. From your perspective how has the mission statement affected decisions made by the board regarding educational policy?
Mission Statement of The Hudson School
Our Mission Statement
"Courage, Compassion and Commitment"

The Hudson School recognizes that children learn naturally, far more than they are taught, and are living on an increasingly interdependent planet. Given these things, the Hudson School accepts the responsibility of recognizing diverse learning styles and encouraging alternative approaches to learning. This approach allows us to seek the development in our students of those skills and capabilities necessary for them to participate intellectually and creatively as responsive adults.

The Hudson School embraces the view that a creative and imaginative mind, a feeling of self-confidence and self-respect, and the ability to get along with others in one's community may well be the best preparation for the future. To accomplish these goals, students must be firmly grounded in the discipline appropriate to their endeavors, they must develop the ability to express their ideas effectively, and they must know how to place those ideas within their social, cultural, or scientific contexts.
Codes and Definitions
Codes and Definitions

Appreciation
"Realization that an event or observation is aligned with the school’s mission and that good things are happening."

Change
"Offers an idea of how to better implement the mission statement; usually resulting in a better school culture."

Choice
"Making decisions without consciously considering the mission statement; decisions based on one’s own judgement or experience."

Collaborative
"Supportive atmosphere; where ideas are shared with colleagues; working towards a common goal."

Competency
"A feeling of being prepared to meet the challenge; confident that they are fulfilling the mission of the school."

Conversation
"Discussion that takes place during the interview which is not directly related to the purpose of the study."

Creative Freedom
"In terms of designing and implementing a creative curriculum to fulfill the school’s mission."

Direction
"Points to how the school fulfills the mission; tells what the school is doing. Usually the mission indirectly informs decisions."

Distinction
"Sees the mission as separate from the mission statement. The mission statement is meant for those outside the community while those inside the community intuitively understand what the mission is."

Facility Effect
"Focuses on the physical plant as being a key factor in implementing the mission statement; refers to the newly constructed building as significant."
Founder Effect
"Influences of the founder on the implementation of the mission and the direct or indirect impact of her day to day involvement in the school during the past twenty-five years."

Frustration
"What happens when an individual tries to fulfill the mission but is unable to because of circumstance or other individual."

Future Thoughts
"Statements about the role of the mission statement when considering future decisions which are not yet imminent or currently being planned."

Historical Perspective
"Individual recalls past events or actions which are connected with fulfilling the mission of The Hudson School."

Indifference
"This individual is unaffected by the mission statement."

Intangibles
"Refers to things an individual “felt” about the mission of the school; things they just knew to be true about its purpose."

Interpretation
"What the individual understands the mission statement to mean; acting according to what you think the mission statement is about."

Mission
"Refers to the purpose of the school, why it exists."

Negative Curricular Decisions
"Decisions made in the area of curriculum which oppose the values of the mission statement."

Negative Effect
"This action has an undesirable effect on the implementation of the mission statement."

Negative Policy Decisions
"Decisions made in the area of school policy which oppose the values of the mission statement."

Outer Rim
"Pertains to the individual’s perception of how the mission of the school is perceived."
Overreaching
"While the individual agrees with the mission statement of the school; they believe it unobtainable, too broad."

Paramount
"Individual expresses the view that the mission of the school will always take precedence in decision making; sense of importance, integrity."

Portrait View
"Expresses the belief that the mission statement is a picture of what the school is; the mission statement is a product, usually having meaning for only outsiders."

Positive Curricular Decisions
"Decisions made in the area of curriculum which reflect the values of the mission statement."

Positive Effect
"This action has a desirable effect on the implementation of the mission statement."

Positive Policy Decisions
"Decisions made in the area of school policy which reflect the values of the mission statement."

Prior Knowledge
"Reflects what the individual knew about the school and its mission before becoming a decision maker in the school community."

Puzzlement
"Individual not sure of how or if the mission statement and decision making fit together."

School Culture
"Pertains to the efficacy of the working environment on an individual; sense of belongingness with the group."

Unexplainable
"Something that is, it is taken for granted and not easy to put into words; gut feelings that tell you to take an action such as start a school."
Ten Interviews with Coding
Interview 1

Describe some things you enjoy about teaching at The Hudson School.

I love kids; I think they are incredibly bright. I think that for the most part they want to work hard. They are willing to work hard for the opportunity. They are grateful for the opportunity. I think the students are a major part of the school. I visit very often with my colleagues. I have some tremendous colleagues. They are open to talking about ideas, sharing ideas, and supporting one another. This isn’t true across the board but the people in my department are wonderful. I think there is a great degree of freedom, which is good and bad, but I can appreciate it.

What do you mean by “degree of freedom”?

Well, for example when I came I was told I would teach 7th and 8th grade. I had no experience, but a master’s degree in but no teaching experience at that grade level and I was given absolutely no direction. So I ran with it because I was really excited about putting my master’s into practice. And I was trained how to develop curriculum but if someone comes in without any background...So freedom is both good and bad.

When did you first become aware of the school’s mission statement?

I don’t know if I saw a mission statement before I started teaching here. I know that the whole environment speaks to the mission statement and I knew that the second I walked in. Can you describe that further?

Sure, the environment is open, it is partly the way people treat each other. There is tremendous respect and support for who you are as an individual and you can feel that. We talk about the mission statement at the beginning of each school year. It’s in the handbook. Can you tell me in your words, what it says?

Well the motto is courage, compassion and commitment. I know that the mission statement is a little bit unruly. There are
a lot of ideas in it—respect for the individual, respect for one’s creativity, respect for where someone is and how are you going to bring them to the next level; honoring their ideas.

Do you talk about the motto more than the mission of the school?

I don’t think so—unless there is a special meeting.

Are there meetings set-aside for talking about the mission?

No we just went through the process of reaccreditation, two years ago, which forced us to talk about it. I think in conversations or in faculty meetings someone might bring it up to support an idea or an agenda they are putting forth but it is not like we are analyzing it for what we want it to say.

You say it is “unruly”. Here is a copy. Please explain what you see as unruly.

Every part of i; is understandable and I respect every part of it. I just think it’s too broad to focus on as a school and as an educator. You know that if your goal is too huge, you don’t relax and find direction. And even though the goals are wonderful, the school could be a little more focused.

Is there anything in the mission statement that is not part of your own educational philosophy?

I agree with everything.

There are three specific goals in the mission statement. The first is focused on curriculum. From your perspective how well is The Hudson School meeting this goal?

I think it depends on the individual teacher. I feel that we have teachers going in and assessing learning styles and doing an amazing job at it. It varies from teacher to teacher.

What thoughts do you have about the faculty realizing this goal?

I think people will toss it out there, sharing examples but as a faculty it goes back to the freedom, perhaps too much freedom, that is the individual choice of the teacher whether or not to
reach this goal. Also I think there is no flexibility in the daily schedule. There's not much room to address different learning styles.

This idea is fostered in several ways. The advisory groups, adults involved in what’s going on in the community. Because we are small and the teacher has such close contact with all members of the community, this goal is met.

The last goal is focused on student character; from your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal.

We address character in the curriculum, this seems logical. In order to shape character, students need to feel there is structure. I don’t feel that this is happening in the school. I think we are sending the wrong message. For some kids its fine to not have structure because they already have that strength of character but for others the inconsistencies of rules I think sends a subversive message which is, “if you can get away with it—try to get away with it” and I don’t think that’s character.

How often is the mission statement used in developing curriculum?

I think it guides but is not directly referred to. It informs a lot of discussion.

What is the curriculum writing process?

Again there is a tremendous amount of freedom for people trying to come up with curriculum. We develop a set of skills that come from discussions. We have academic conversations all the time about curriculum.

From your perspective, how has the mission statement impacted instruction at The Hudson School?

I think that for the most part the administration looks to hire people who embody the mission. And then in turn, when they are in the classroom or developing curriculum, it’s a reflection of who they are. Therefore if the right person is chosen the mission is embodied in them.
If you were on the committee to re-write the mission statement what would you change?
I would make it more succinct.
What are some of your ideas?
I don’t know. I just feel like it’s a reflection of the school and I feel like what’s missing from it, and from the school itself, is some sort of bottom line, a structure, a foundation.
There isn’t enough responsibility placed on the student.

Interview 2

Describe some things you enjoy about teaching at The Hudson School.
I enjoy being in a community that is really vibrant, intellectual and student centered teachers. I really enjoy the freedom to create a curriculum.
Is there anything in the mission statement that is not part of your own educational philosophy?
Well, I have to say that I was hired me because of my philosophy, because it was very much in sync with the person who hired me. So the curriculum evolved out of my philosophy of education, which is, I need to put it as succinctly as possible... an integrated curriculum and I very much believe in a hands on program. I try to develop the skills needed, basically how to understand what you’re reading and how to write a complete sentence, things like that.

How much of the mission statement were you aware of when you were hired?
Very little – consciously – although, you know, and I can’t say that I have read it more than four times total in the time I’ve been here so I can’t say that its directly affected me at all... but in so much as it is a clear expression of the founder’s philosophy, and she is the benevolent dictator of the school – it permeates—it does – to a certain extent.
You were aware that there was a particular mission of this school, what it was...
Yes.

Can you look back to what you understood that to be?

Well, I think a big part of it was to turn kids on to their creative energy - to really find their passion - give them a venue to express themselves - not that I think all the teachers follow the mission statement. I don't think there's any monitoring of that or follow through on what is in the mission statement.

Do you think the mission statement is generally understood by all of the teachers who are part of the community?

No, and I also think there is some conflict with it. I think there is a mission statement, but then on the other hand, there's a sense that the ideal school is a very old European style school. I think there is a sense that if we only hire college professors who have a real passion for what they are doing, the kids will rise to that level, and I don't think there's a sense that teachers have to be age appropriate or have to know much about education or how to teach. The skills of teaching in various modalities, even though it's in the mission statement, I don't think it's really, really valued in the hiring of teachers.

I think that's why we don't always follow the mission statement - there's lots of chalk and talk teachers here.

There are three specific goals in the mission statement. The first is focused on curriculum. From your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal.

As a school, I think we fail in that. I don't think we rise to that very often. I'd say that there're individual teachers who are outstanding and I don't think there's any real support for other teachers to evolve that way, and I don't know what that support should look like. It doesn't help to have someone come in and give a two hour workshop. It just doesn't.

Has it ever been discussed - that need?

It comes up, but I find the teachers - the longer they're here, the more set in their ways they are. Myself included. If this were a goal that they understood and embraced... yeah, then they would want to do what it takes to learn how to do that.
There are so many teachers—that we don’t gel as a team. And when we do, the founder comes in and says what it is going to be so that undermines the power of the team.

The second goal is focused on community; from your perspective how well is The Hudson School meeting this goal?

When it comes to the second goal, if you include the self-confidence and self-respect, which I associate with a community, I think we excel to a great degree. I think kids come out of The Hudson School decent human beings. There are kids who come here very emotionally fragile. And I don’t think we do a whole lot to help them—some of them leave here and fall apart or they somehow hold it together while they’re here. We teach them to be decent human beings who value other human beings who are considerate, who by and large respect and care about others. I think we do that very, very well and I’m proud of that. I think a lot of parents would say this school is a real fit for my child, my child is safe here. I think it takes a lot of courage to take the kinds of creative risks these kids take. I think they really do. They develop a lot of compassion for each other. They really do. They work in small groups often, and they have to help each other. And wait for each other and they don’t want to wait. They don’t want to.

They do and they learn to follow through on the assignment and meet responsibilities a little bit. I can keep on top of them. I’m with them most of the day so I can track them down until they do it.

From your perspective, how has the mission statement impacted instruction at The Hudson School?

In terms of curriculum, I would have to say that half of the school is really excellent and about half of the school is not recognizing diverse learning styles and encouraging alternative approaches. About half and half, and it looks to me like the right people were hired or they weren’t. And either people are willing to move or they aren’t somehow given the right education to move. In terms of community, I think it’s excellent, I really do. I just can’t... and in terms of character, I think we go a very far way to being successful. Just more work on commitment and follow through.... really responsibility.

How often at meetings or in conversations when you’re talking about curriculum, just focusing on curriculum, does the mission statement come up?
You know, a lot of meetings center on this, the feeling of self-confidence and self-respect of students and courage and compassion. A lot of meetings focus on the heart of the mission, that we care more about that these kids become decent people, good people, sending good leaders into the world. There’s not enough discussion of how we can include alternate learning style, how we can get projects going, there’s not enough, because we’re all too afraid of stepping on someone’s toes, of insulting someone, and people don’t want to work hard, it’s much more work to coordinate curriculum, its more work to do a project than read the textbook, take a test and I’ll give you a lecture on it.

What is the curriculum writing process?

There is not a formal process. When we are so desperate, because it’s so awful, we’re floundering, we’re gasping, then we get together to work on it. You know, I’d say twice a year we’re supposed to get together and have curriculum meetings and some departments do and some don’t get together.

Do you think if you got together more often on curriculum, would you see this goal being worked on?

Well, maybe a little bit, maybe. I actually think one area of the curriculum got together a few years ago and it worked. I know another department has a lot of trouble talking to each other.

From your perspective, how has the mission statement affected the development and delivery of instruction?

Well, that’s where we are at in terms of teacher development. The ones who develop as great teachers are the ones who really enjoy the interaction with other teachers and learning from other teachers. And they visit each other’s classrooms and learn from each other.

The last question is, if you were part of a committee to revise the mission statement, to rewrite it, tweak it, rework it, what you would want to do to it. What would you change?

What do you think needs to be emphasized, deleted, and changed?

The problem is it’s not followed through on enough, but I
really love what it says.

The last goal is focused on student character; from your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal.

I think it does. I think it does, but I think the staff is so large it's not always communicated well.

So your perception would be they know there's a mission statement, but it is...

Its there, but not something that's brought to our attention.

Interview 3

Describe what it is you enjoy about teaching at The Hudson School.

I think the most important thing is that there is some academic freedom to design curriculum to teach the way you like to teach. Time to find out how to teach and to find out what topics you want to include. There is also freedom to make changes in your daily schedule. If I feel that there is an important issue I can make a change, it's my decision and so I have a lot of authority and that creativity and freedom is wonderful.

How do your experiences here compare with those of other schools?

It's very different. One school I was at was old and strict in its ways instead of a creative teacher I was too much a teacher doing whatever I was told to do. That didn't fit my philosophy, the salary was good but it wasn't satisfying. In another school the school had problems with the board, it was unclear as to who had authority in the school; it was always an administrative mess. The relationship between teachers, administration and board were unclear. Here I don't feel interfered with; I feel supported most of the time.

I feel I have great influence in what I do.

When were you first aware of The Hudson School's mission statement?
For me the biggest mission statement has been—I didn’t need to read it when I came to the school. What I realized right away was that I had a lot of power to do what I thought was important. I think that is very important for job satisfaction.

How did you know that you know that the school was the right place for you what about its mission matching your needs?

I think that the school has an open structure in terms of designing curriculum and running things. When I came there was very little in so I had to start from scratch in some ways I was very lucky. I like that. Everything that is happening I have had some say in it. There wasn’t too much administrative structure. In some ways that is annoying as in consequences for student behavior and everyday things but it is developing. Sometimes I have too much responsibility in dealing with students. There is not a lot written down.

In your own words what does the mission statement say?

I think we want to offer a challenging program for student; so that no matter where you are in your academic development there is always the next course you can take. If you are a fast learner then you can move faster than others can. I think we also try to have a diverse curriculum by offering extra-curricular activities. These are the two things I think are in the mission statement, whether they are worded that way or not.

Here is a copy of the mission statement to look at.

I guess it’s pretty much what I was saying. I didn’t say anything about development as a human being, however I agree it should be there.

Is there anything your think needs to be defined or explained?

I think that we teach thoroughly, our size puts some limitations on what we offer. You can only have so many courses with only two or three students. I think our mission statement is modest it’s not utopia, not overreaching. I think it could have something added to it later but for now it is pretty good.

There are three specific goals in the mission statement. The first is focused on curriculum. From your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?
To some extent, diverse learning styles and alternative approaches to learning require some hardware. A teacher can do some but you need some help.

Do you discuss these needs in faculty meetings?

Yes we do but on the other hand teachers have teaching styles and they don’t always match the learning styles of students. I would like to add that when I teach I try to make my students as teacher independent as possible. In America students are very teacher dependent and I try to push them in the opposite direction so they are less dependent on how the teacher teaches.

The second goal is focused on community; from your perspective how well is The Hudson School meeting this goal?

I think we do that in our curriculum, the faculty is aware of how important it is for students to express themselves. I think the students we choose, if this is the right school for a student I think they will grow to be self-confident. So the community question becomes how we accept students. I think that sometimes we choose students incorrectly. Ability to get along with others in the community is an ambitious statement to make. We do parenting to some extent; this is the hardest goal of all. We don’t have enough staff to deal with the social aspects.

The last goal is focused on student character; from your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

I think this one is harder than the one we just spoke about. Most of this comes from home. This is a very ambitious goal. It deals with moral issues and I have students who have not changed one bit in this area. The goal is individual, family, and neighborhood based more than school based. I don’t have anything in place to address this. This goal falls on teachers and the types of teachers who are hired have a lot to do with this. Teachers set examples. It’s good to have a statement like that but it’s up to the staff and depends on their philosophy or core values.

How do you implement new or revised curriculum? What is the process you follow? Was the mission statement involved?

I worked from big to small. I didn’t have a lot of help; other
teachers kept coming and going. Now we have a teacher who
seems to be staying for a while, so we are making an effort to
nail down some curriculum. The mission statement was not
involved but I must say our curriculum automatically addresses
the issues in the mission statement.

How has your curriculum and instruction addressed the mission
statement?

Our mission statement came after the school created itself. I
think our school has grown because of the academic freedom
or freedom to create curriculum and teaching the way you see
as being important has shaped our mission statement. In other
words, it came from within the school instead of being given to
the school from the outside. The process has generated the
mission statement.

So you think that the mission statement evolved as the school
grew?

I think so it has come with experience and time. I like that it’s
through trial and error, experience. I think that’s the best
mission statement. I mean you argue that there is no idealism
here—shouldn’t we have started with the idealism first but
when you start a school some of those ideals are obvious
without stating them.

If you were on the committee to re-write the mission statement
what would you change?

Well, teaching the basics as we do satisfies the mission
statement. But what you can never teach enough of is the
global view, we must convey to students the importance of
these issues and they change so they can’t be written in the
mission statement in detail. Bring the rest of the world into the
classroom. I would add a global statement to the philosophical
statement that we already have.

Is there anything you would like to add? Do you believe it is
having an impact on instruction?

I think that the person who started the school is creative and
allows it to blossom. She doesn’t believe in a strict set of rules
for education—it is a dynamic process. One thing is for sure;
our mission statement is not set in stone and is not inflexible.
How have you seen change in the mission statement? What does the mission statement mean to the running of a school?

The mission statement is open, you could build on it, and there is room for interpretation. A mission statement, I guess is a foundation from where you build a house, what it will look like—who knows? Something to fall back on. I don't know what it should be.

Interview 4

Describe what it is you enjoy about teaching at The Hudson School.

Well, The Hudson School has an intimate atmosphere where you get to know the students well. It's a big benefit to me as a teacher. This is largely because of the size and partly because of the teacher that this happens. This is a good place to be if you want to get to know students well.

When did you first see a mission statement?

I think it was when we first started to develop it. I don't know when that was exactly. If one existed before that I was just unaware of it. So it is possible that one existed without me knowing it. You could know what the school was about just by talking to the director, even for a short time. This is her school, and these are her ideas and we all have rallied around them over the years. But I think I was aware of what type of school we had very soon after I started teaching here. I believe the first written mission statement I remember seeing was when we first became accredited. Before that we had done some thinking about who we are, and what our identity is and how we felt about education and learning.

What do you understand the mission of The Hudson School?

Well, I think individualized learning; the emphasis on the individual is foremost here. Very often we have small classes to accommodate student needs or an interest, that's big part of what we are about. Kids tend not to fall through the cracks here as they can in larger schools. I know almost all the parents of my students. Beyond that we offer a strong
academic curriculum, yet we have the ability to deal with all
types of students. The curriculum in most disciplines is open
ended in that they can take courses at their ability level.

So do you feel that the intentional mission of the school was to
provide individualized learning appropriate for student's ability
level?

Yes, absolutely. We have to go back to the roots of the school
and it was founded. I came when it was three years old but it
didn't change much. In my first year there were fewer than
fifty students. One of the reasons the school was founded was
because some of those able kids were really being lost in the
public school system. They weren't getting the kind of
attention that they needed and they weren't getting the kind of
academic program that could challenge them. This was one of
the reasons the school was founded and that was obvious from
the moment I walked in the door and I think it is still prevalent.

In your own words, what does the mission statement say?

There's recognition of diversity in learning styles, an emphasis
on the individual and the development of a challenging
curriculum.

There are three specific goals in the mission statement. The
first is focused on curriculum. From your perspective how
well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

Over the years with the director's encouragement we as a staff
have become aware that there are different learning styles and
students learn under different conditions. We have been
encouraged to deal with as best we can the diversity in the
classroom. I have tried to incorporate a multi-sensory
approach in my teaching. I do emphasis visual, oral and tactile
skills in doing that I have been successful on national
standardized tests.

The second goal is focused on community; from your
perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

Our students meet at grade level meetings and are involved in
community service. This helps nurture a positive school and
community atmosphere. I think that because of the size of the
school, our kids are forced to socialize with each other. I think
this is a strength and the faculty works towards that goal in
own individual ways. We talk about the atmosphere of the
school and the betterment of the school quite frequently.

The last goal is focused on student character; from your
perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

A lofty goal. The part of character that is emphasized most at
this school is compassion. The faculty is willing to help
students and students are willing to help each other. We are
concerned about the well being of everyone inside and outside
the school.

Are the core beliefs expressed in the mission statement written
early in the school's history the same as those expressed in this
revised edition?

Yes, for sure. The mission has not changed dramatically. I
think the core beliefs and the goals are basically the same.
Maybe because we have the same founding director.

If you were on the committee to re-write the mission statement
what would you change?

Hard for me to answer. In order to give a good answer I
would need to know about what everyone else was doing. We
meet as a faculty once a month but there is only so much I am
going to find out about what's happening in different
classrooms. I don't feel qualified to say how I would change
the mission statement without further research.

Do you think the mission statement clearly defines what The
Hudson School is doing?

I suppose so, it is rather vaguely worded. Every mission
statement I have ever read has been vague. It's very broad; I
don't know how specific you can be in a mission statement.
You want to include everything because the more specific you
make it the exclusive you become.

Are mission statements necessary?

I think what's necessary is sitting around and deciding what
should in the mission statement. I don't think the statement
itself is. The process is far more important than the product. I
think the benefit comes from asking who do we think we are,
what we are doing and are we doing what we think we are doing; instead of just saying we are this and that. I think that is far more valuable.

Who is a mission statement written for?

For everyone. I think it’s for us primarily because we need to remind ourselves where we are going. It’s like a road map.

Is the Hudson School using the mission statement as a road map to make curriculum decisions?

Hard for me to know because I don’t visit other classrooms.

Interview 5

Describe what it is you enjoy about teaching at The Hudson School.

I enjoy that it’s not quite so regular, in that you have a lot of freedom to make your own curriculum and the cooperation between teachers. Lots of flexibility in terms of curriculum and instruction.

When were you first aware of The Hudson School’s mission statement?

I don’t recall, it’s interesting, I don’t remember reading it before I was hired. It was not at the interview and during my first few years here I was looking at how the school was operating to inform my decisions about what I should be doing. I adapted to what I saw going on around me. I was not in touch with the mission statement until I had been in the school three or four years. I remember a long mission statement being read once at the beginning of the school year, it was hard to process all at once. We did discuss it and people made comments on what we were doing. We were looking to see if we fit that statement. Now we have a shorter version, which is a work in progress, it was never finalized. The accreditation team required one.

How does this revised mission statement match your educational philosophy?
I don’t understand the last two sentences. I’m not sure what we are supposed to be doing according to these goals. The last paragraph needs to be clearer.

There are three specific goals in the mission statement. The first is focused on curriculum. From your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

I think its individual. We have some faculty who are more interested in content, subject matter than alternative learning techniques. I think we had had a complaint about that from parents. It is a desirable goal but is not being fully realized as a school.

The second goal is focused on community; from your perspective how well The Hudson School is meeting this goal?

I think that it’s piecemeal, in some situations the faculty spends a lot of time making sure that happens. I don’t think every one is working on it though. It may be a by-product of how certain people relate within the school.

Can you give some adjectives which describe the school community?

Creative, chaotic, it’s not a respectful community. There are a few people who set a good example and others who set a bad example. I would say that we’re not doing a good job is this area. There needs to be follow through.

Is there a curriculum writing process?

We develop curriculum in terms of concrete things you as a teacher should be doing. It is so general that teachers can pick and choose. There is no intentional recognition of students various learning styles. We do discuss how to teach curriculum in the meetings but the curriculum itself is content based.

How has the mission statement impacted delivery of instruction?

I am not sure that it does or that might vary from department to department. I think the mission statement should drive instruction. I think you shouldn’t be hired unless you agree with the mission statement. We should be a group of people
who are aligned by that mission statement. We are not; I don’t think people read it and some might not even agree with it.

Why do you think that there is not widespread acknowledgement of the mission statement among the faculty members?

I think that teachers are hired for various reasons, not always for their philosophy. The mission statement is not what drives the hiring decision.

If you were on the committee to re-write the mission statement what would you change?

Rewrite it, to make it clearer. Present it to the community as a new statement. I would like to see people more aligned; we would have a much better school. It’s random now, there are no standards that we are held up to.

Interview 6

Why did you join the Board of Trustees?

Actually Sue asked me to join the board. At the time I was on another school board.

What did you know about The Hudson School?

I knew a lot about how the school operated. I knew less about the financial aspect but I knew about the history and philosophy of the school.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees?

Basically we are an advisory board. The operational side which has to do with approving the budget, keeping an eye on the budget and staying in its bounds. Then there’s the role of trying to understand things like enrollment trends, how we shape the school.

In your own words, tell me what the mission of The Hudson School is.

A school which is dedicated towards students who are high achievers. The school provides a good college preparatory program. I don’t remember what is in the mission statement.
don't remember the wording of it at all. I know there is something
about a student-oriented program.

Is there anything in the mission statement that you didn't expect to
find there?

Language about getting along with others, community. The board
doesn't play a role in the day to day learning obviously. I think
our role is to provide any tools you might need to carry out the
mission statement. The most recent example is the building. The
board has provided a stable environment of a quality so that the
mission statement can be addressed. The building has fueled a lot
of interest in the school. But I don't think a building is all that
important to a school like The Hudson School but many people see
the building and it attracts them to the school. Otherwise I think
the other thing we do is to make sure that we are budgeted in such
a way that can hire the people that will make this happen. We
don't directly address the philosophy of the school as a board.
This is an important job for the faculty to have. At some point we
approve most policies. If there were some important change, Sue
would bring it to the board. I don't think that we are particularly
proactive in monitoring that issue. We get reports from Sue about
what is happening in the school.

What is the role of the board in the decision making process?

We don't play a very significant role in the decision making
process.

Recall a time when the mission statement was discussed in a board
meeting.

Recall a time when the mission statement was discussed at a board
meeting.

Time was set aside to do some policy in connection with the
middle states accreditation. There was a sub committee with
teachers; I can't remember exactly what the process was. I find
it very hard to get my hands around mission statements; I have
one at work and it doesn't have any impact on my life, none
whichever. I think they're very nice to have, put them on a
plaque somewhere and then you go to work. Certainly you
wouldn't want a mission statement to say some bizarre thing that
is not connected with the school. People try to see what is
happening at the school and then put that in the mission
statement. It reflects the school; the school is big on intellectual
achievement, a disciplined approach.

Your perception is that the mission statement is not a guiding factor but a reflection of what the school is about.

It seems to come about that way. When you write one you don’t sit down and say what you want it to be but we already know what it is. Every time I have been involved in a mission statement that is the way it comes about.

When making decisions regarding policy, how does the board resolve conflict? And what role does the mission decision play?

I’d say the board works by consensus building more than anything else. Rarely are there split decision votes. Much of what happens is information processing.

Describe three major challenges that The Hudson School will be facing in the future and how will the mission statement help the board meet these challenges?

Financial, the building, and achieving full enrollment. None have a direct bearing on the mission statement. Challenges are associated with the private school market place. Having a school that reflects the mission statement helps us in a competitive market. Most decisions are made on practical considerations.

There are strategic decisions made on understanding what the school is about. How the director populates the staff is very important. The key ingredients of a school are the students, and staff, you want the kind of people that fit the school. So Sue works very hard at hiring creative people. Its not always 100 percent successful, there are turnover issues.

How does the board assist the director in these areas?

We insist that she sticks to the budget (laughter) and she doesn’t so we try to make it work. It’s a difficult balancing act. We have many part time teachers to help us balance the budget. It’s probably only possible to run a school like this in like Hudson County. You have a lot of people putting together a livelihood by doing a lot of different things.

How do you think the educational policies developed by the board help students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and
commitment, the overarching goal of the mission statement?

Primarily by making sure they have a stable environment so they
don't have to worry if the school is going to open the next day.
That gives possibilities, we have never had situation where the
school might close. That is the most important thing we do. It's a
very supportive environment for the students and the board secures
that in an indirect way.

Are there any chanThat gives possibilityke to the mission
statement?

Basiclly leave it like it is, although I would like to see something
added. It may not be a mission issue but the idea of economic
diversity should be there. In other words, making the school open
to as wide a swath of society as possible so that we don't end up
with just high end students.

Can practical decisions be based on the mission statement?

I think so; the statement is helpful to someone who is a total
stranger to the school. But those involved in the school have a
visceral understanding of what the place is about and you wouldn't
make practical decisions, which are counter to the mission. At The
Hudson School everyone is so inculcated with what the school is
all about making a decision counter to the mission statement is not
an issue.

Interview 7

Why did you join the Board of Trustees? What did you know
about the school before you joined?

I was asked by Suellen and the current board president. I had
known Suellen for about seven years before I joined the board and
I thought that it was an honor to be asked. I knew it was a school
that catered to gifted children, children who had abilities that went
beyond what could be offered in a public school. Also the school
worked with students who couldn't afford to go to a private school.
So there was a lot of work done with providing scholarships.

In your own words, tell me what the mission of The Hudson
School is.

The school emphasizes language arts, music, drama, science, math;
it's a specialty school not right for all children. For the right
students it gives a type of unique education. I have read the
mission statement. I have seen it developed over the years. I
know we didn't have one fifteen years ago. Or if we did I never
saw it. I remember when it was revised we had an opportunity to
read the draft and give our input.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees?

To guide the school in policy decisions through consensus. Lately
we have been involved in the new building. This took a lot of time
and planning.

Does the mission statement inform the decisions made by the
board?

I think like many things it's written it's read and then put on a shelf.
We don't look back on it. If there's a budget decision we don't go
back and read the mission statement before we comment on it. If
there's a decision about the building we don't re-read the mission
statement. At the same time though it's important to say we
worked on it and it remains in the back of all of our minds when
making a decision. Probably many of us wouldn't feel the same
way about the school if we didn't have a mission statement. So
somewhere subconsciously, it does exist, it's something you agree
to but are not always referring back to.

When making decisions regarding policy, how does the board
resolve conflict? And what role does the mission statement play?

When issues arise, we discuss them. Sometimes this happens via
email before the board meeting. Fortunately, we have never had a
conflict in which the principles of the mission statement were
challenged. Usually the issues we deal with are practical
decisions, about how the school needs to be run, the budget, etc.
There has never been a challenge to the mission statement. Very
often everyone really gives up to Suellen. We all respect her to the
extent that if there's a real discussion, and nobody knows the
answer, she becomes the guiding voice. She is so committed to the
mission statement that you don't waiver from it. There has never
really been an issue that came up within the board that I believe
would go against the mission statement.

How do you think the educational policies developed by the board
help students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and
commitment, the overarching goal of the mission statement?

An example would be scholarships. We decided by looking at past practice, reality of the budget, the feelings of the board and Suellen. Her idea of what scholarships should be, where she thought we should be going so that she could continue to live by what the mission statement is. I believe she understands it, she’s my guiding light in this whole thing and I wouldn’t be involved if it wasn’t for her. The school wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for her, her strength, and desire. Ultimately that’s where I turn to make sure the decisions we are making are within the mission statement.

Is there anything about mission statements that you would like to add?

The mission statement is like an executive summary for anyone interested in donating or understanding the school.

Interview 8

Why did you join the Board of Trustees?

A classmate from The Hudson School became board treasurer and because the board was trying to attract younger members and alumni, he invited me to join.

What is the role of the Board of Trustees?

I don’t know if our role is any different from other boards; oversight and governance. We also serve as a place to bounce ideas off of for Suellen.

In your own words, tell me what the mission of The Hudson School is. What do you understand the mission statement to be?

The first time I was aware of the mission statement was when it came in a packet of materials given to me when I was asked to be a board member. There is a difference between what the mission is and what the mission statement says. They are not unrelated but a mission statement by definition is a very broad statement to allow movement in and around it. So when you say, for example, to provide a love of learning, that is an intentionally broad statement. The mission statement doesn’t talk very much about how you do that. The unspoken thing that we are all aware of in the founding of the school is the idea that students should have the opportunity
to get a good education notwithstanding their financial situation.

So perhaps in a clearer way we are all very aware of trying to
provide a progressive, classical education to serve the community
to broaden what we think of as community and to provide
education for students who otherwise would not be able to pay for
education. When Suellen founded the school there were not
alternatives of this type to the public schools.

Do you think the board is considering the written mission
statement to be a guide for making decisions?

If you mean a guide in that if an issue is put the board, we pull out
our mission statements and try to match things up, certainly not.
But because it is broad and we keep the mission in our mind it is
certainly a guide. Its how we all feel and believe about the school.

Does this mission statement reflect the school’s mission? Who is
it written for?

When you walk into the school you see things like artwork or the
theater and you know it’s a creative school. The mission statement
is a marketing tool. The mission itself is not for outsiders, it really
is for guiding the culture of the school, for guiding curricular
decisions, raising tuition, etc. You have to think like if we raise
 tuition are we still within our mission. But the mission statement
itself has to express what is going on at the school.

How is the unwritten mission used by the board to make decisions?

I think we often will say, does this fit in with what we want to do,
which is another way of saying, does this meet the mission.
Whether it’s building a new building or allocating money for new
lights, these are all mission related things. You never want to
make precedent by doing something that takes away from the
mission.

Describe the decision making process used by the board.

Amazingly enough we follow our meeting agenda. When the
items come up we come in prepared to discuss it. I think everyone
feels they are in a safe place to discuss differences of opinion. I
can think of very few times when there was a division on the
board. Everyone takes part and then we try to come to a consensus
decision.

Describe three major challenges that The Hudson School will be
facing in the future. And how will the mission statement help the
board meet these challenges?

The board is not heavily involved in curricular decisions, we trust
Suellen to handle that. The headmaster (Suellen) has ownership of
hiring or if something calls for a policy change we will ask Suellen
to make recommendations, since that is her job. I think it will
affect us when we look for a successor for Suellen, we will want
her to be active in choosing someone to come in and take over. At
that point we will need to seriously examine the mission and see
how choosing another person will affect it. Because Suellen as
both founder and headmaster has a very different role than anyone
else would have. She is really the creator of the mission, this
means that you really don’t have to worry because she is sitting
there and we can ask her a question. We have our little mission
divining rod sitting right there.

How do you think the educational policies developed by the board
help students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and
commitment, the overarching goal of the mission statement?

I can’t think of a one for one connection where a policy has a
direct effect. We try to apply those qualities to our discussions. I
do think they are translated to the students through the overarching
culture of the school and through what they learn in the classroom.
All of our policy decisions have to fit with that atmosphere. It’s a
holistic approach here. I’m trying to compare it other boards I’ve
worked with; in those cases I can really see a direct correlation
between a board decision and something within the mission. Here
I can’t see those types of comparisons.

How do you think the mission statement has informed and
contributed to the decision making process at The Hudson School?

The mission was a prime driver of having a building because we
knew the mission couldn’t go on without a building. We didn’t
want to do anything that was contrary to the mission. We tried to
make sure the building plan was consistent with the school’s ethos.

Is there anything you would like to add?

The mission statement is an expression of everything that guides
you in running an institution. It contains some goals and in a less
direct way informs how you would reach those goals. The role of
the board is to make sure the administration has the means to
provide the things of the mission and to check up to see that it’s
happening. The board is responsible for making sure it all
happens. Nothing counter to the mission should happen. In this
case we have less concern with accountability because we have a
founder still in charge of the school. In other cases the board
would be forced to be much more hands on to make sure that the
key administrator's understood what they are to do with the
mission.

Interview 9

What is the role of the Board of Trustees?

Primary function is to ensure the mission and ultimately we are
responsible for everything that happens. As a practical matter, it
means we oversee the administration of the school and the director
(Suellen) reports to us. We set the budget and tuition and all major
strategic moves are imitated or approved by the board.

In your own words, tell me what the mission of The Hudson
School is. What do you understand the mission statement to be?

To paraphrase, it is to provide a first rate education for
intellectually curious children in a way that develops them to the
fullest of their abilities regardless of their background.

How does the mission statement inform the decisions made by the
board?

I would say from time to time on critical issues the mission
statement has come up. It is certainly not something we talk about
at most meetings but when we are discussing things like
scholarships, financial aid assistance. We find ourselves coming
back to what our role is and we look at the mission statement. For
example, years ago this question came up, geographically, who are
the students we should be helping and there was a board member
who asked, is it our mission to help a child from Ghana who wants
to come to The Hudson School. Does that fit within the mission or
not and I think on some examination we determined that yes it
does fit within the mission; we are not restricted to just local
children. We often talk about how we do not want to compromise
the academic caliber of the school just to balance the budget.
Nothing we do should be counter to the mission statement. On
average our members have been on the board nine or ten years so
they know the mission. There is tremendous continuity; they do
not need to be reminded of what the mission statement is.
During the re-accreditation process what role did the board play in rewriting the mission statement?

We did a little bit of work. What I recall is that some of the words were changed but the core concepts certainly weren’t. It was trying to abbreviate it and get the statement down to its essence.

Do you think the community at large understands the mission of the school?

No. I don’t think the community at large understands what the school is about.

How about the members of the school community?

Very important for faculty, board and administration to be aware of it. I don’t think it really matters whether the students and the parents are aware of it. All the decision makers should be aware of it but I see why the “subjects” so to speak, need to be aware of it.

Describe three major challenges that The Hudson School will be facing in the future. And how will the mission statement help the board meet these challenges?

The board doesn’t normally deal with instruction, that’s the administration’s job. We don’t micromanage but take some interest. The thing we have to deal with now is the question of continuity in the school. I had two goals when becoming president, one was to get a building and the other was to build an institution, which would survive the departure of the director, Suellen. So my goal is to finish strengthening the school to the point where it will go on without her. To a lot of people The Hudson School and Suellen are inseparable and that’s not good for the school. So what I feel I have accomplished with the board during the past fifteen years is, we now have an independent, and we have a strong independent board. During this time I have gotten comfortable with taking positions that Suellen may not agree. Now we are comfortable standing up and saying what we want to do and we need to strengthen the school financially, the new building is a big part of the picture. Rented space was always a risk to the long-term health of the institution. Little by little we will need to faze Suellen out; she has always done a lot of jobs at the school. During the past few years, she has given up some of those jobs and we will continue to push that. It’s important to the school to gradually have other people take on functions that she has done.
think this will help provide a seamless transition when she is ready to leave. I think that this is probably the most critical thing the board needs to do over the next five years. That’s not separate from the financial aspect because she has historically done a lot of fund raising and has the personal relationships with many of these foundations.

Do you think the mission statement will need to be changed to meet any of these challenges?

I certainly hope not. It’s a sorry mission if it can’t survive the director (Suellen). To some extent it is her mission because she is the founder but I’d like to think that the mission will continue and it’s not dependent on Suellen as director. So the core beliefs, having a diverse student population and a demanding academic program I expect will survive her.

How do you think the educational policies developed by the board help students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and commitment, the overarching goal of the mission statement?

I’m not sure it does. I think we provide the support mechanism for the faculty and administration to do that. The board knows that these are very important things for Suellen and they are reflected in the way she hires faculty members and chooses students. She chooses people who can work with this program. I believe the qualities are happening but apart from Suellen the board is not directly involved helping students achieve them.

What is the value of a mission statement to you personally and to the board?

Mission statements have a value, absolutely. We do come back to the mission statement both directly and indirectly. We say, wait a minute what is our goal and I can’t remember how many discussions where it was mentioned. For example, an issue came up about all the seats at the school had not been filled; we knew that we had applicants to fill these seats. But we couldn’t just fill the seats with any applicant because it would have compromised the mission of the school and its integrity. We have never backed down on it and periodically we have to remind ourselves that it is what we are all about and that we would rather take a financial hit that to compromise the integrity of the admissions process. The mission statement is important because if it weren’t there it would be easy just to fill the seats. If we look at the mission statement as a moral purpose by which we live then we will not make
compromise when it comes to the mission of the school.

Interview 10

Please describe the impetus for creating the school. Describe the process you used in developing the mission statement.

Probably the term mission statement didn’t enter my brain. My purpose grew out of a series of experiences I had trying to modify change in the public school system as a volunteer. I had invested about six years of being a parent volunteer when my children were going to school. In the 1970’s the schools were largely Hispanic and there were some wonderful, bright, alive, curious, creative children in those classes. Over the years I met some wonderful teachers who allowed me into their classrooms and had invited me to bring in creative writing exercises, teach the arts and read stories. These teachers and I had agreed that within the context of the system at that time there was not a lot more that they could do to enhance the program other than pull out programs or add-ons. The frustration I faced at the time was that I felt there was a large segment of the student population who were working above grade level or had the potential to work above their current level. I felt they were ready for extra courses or some in-depth studies. The program wasn’t set up to deal with those children. In particular I was frustrated by the lack of expansion in the arts, music and no foreign language program. I thought these subjects should be part of the middle school experience. That led me to imagine a school that would bring out the best in children. This led me to talk to other parents about how they felt. The mission to allow children to soar, to tap their potential, to unlock some doors, and to show them opportunities where they might explore was what led me to create an experiment with one of my own children and seventeen others.

How did the teachers who you spoke with feel about this experiment?

They were more than ready to agree that there were only certain things they could do, because they had to follow a curriculum and could not deviate too far from it. Certainly they could not teach a foreign language at the middle school level in the 1970’s.

How did you turned the school you imagined into a reality?

I guess there was a muse in my head. I imagined the perfect middle school. I had been thinking about curriculum for most of
my adult like. I had studied curriculum development at the
University of Chicago; I had children whose education I felt was
not expansive. I got together with a few parents, and educators, we
almost unanimously agreed that an ideal program should include
cultural geography, language, the arts, etc. I simply decided I
would do this in my home but my husband objected so I found
space elsewhere. At a party I met the secretary of the Dodge
Foundation. I told her about my idea and she suggested that her
boss might be interested in seeding it. I sent the letter off in July
and at the end of September I received a response and $6,000
check. The school opened ten days later and the Dodge
Foundation funded us for eighteen years. Before we opened we
had had many long discussions about our philosophy and what we
wanted in a school. One thing I should add was that it was critical
that the school is open to all children regardless of their ability to
pay. We honor and celebrate ethnic diversity from day one. That
we throw a lifeline to families whom could not afford the $1,200
tuition. My concept was that if we were successful the first year,
the board of education might consider picking up and doing it
themselves. In fact, for the first two years we did go back and
meet with the board of education, proposing that some if not all of
the ideas were very successful for the middle school age child but
they didn't pick up the program. At the time there were some
choice schools starting in New York City but I had no intention of
starting one.

Those ideas of cultural and economic diversity do not occur in the
mission statement.

I am aware of that and have thought about it. The reason it doesn't
occur in the mission statement is because I take it for granted and
the school would be what it is if that wasn't our mission. Anyone
who comes here for more than five minutes senses it. It's the way
I live life. It's so much a given to me. If because of the longevity
of the school it's needed then it probably go in the mission
statement to make sure that that part of the mission never changes.
But it's absolutely a given and it's in every aspect of the school
from everything we teach to everything we do. It never stood out
as missing because I never thought you had to say it. When you
live something you're not always articulating it.

Do you think the community at large understands your mission?

I absolutely do that's why families choose to come here. People
coming here for the first time pick up on the idea of community.
How do bridge the dual roles of headmaster (and founder) and board member?

I am the educator. I come to the board meetings to report on what is happening at the school. When I come to board meetings I am there to report on how things are going. I am very respectful and thankful for the expertise of the board members. They make sure we are fiscally responsible. If there is something that would impinge on the mission of the school or the day-to-day operation of then they make decisions. They are respectful of me, they don’t micro-manage. I’ve enjoyed the respect of the board members and I give them my respect.

In your own words, tell me what the mission of The Hudson School is. What do you understand the mission statement to be?

For me it’s intuitive. I look at the written words and say, yeah, that’s close enough. I never have spent an inordinate amount of time trying to say it. To say it in three or four sentences is terribly difficult. It’s your philosophy; it’s your way of life. The mission statement is the philosophy; it’s the people you hire, the way you treat others. The motto (courage, commitment and compassion) is close enough to what the philosophy is. For example, what we can do to expand the horizons for children, to make sure they respect and honor different traditions. That is constantly in the forefront of our minds when making decisions.

When making decisions regarding policy, how does the board resolve conflict? And what role does the mission statement play?

I can only think of one time. There was a deficit and a suggestion came up to reduce financial aid. I simply restated my mission; I did not want that to be the way we handled our financial difficulties. It would have impacted the mission of the school. Other board members also felt that it would change the character of the school. That discussion didn’t last for more than one board meeting.

Describe three major challenges that The Hudson School will be facing in the future. And how will the mission statement help the board meet these challenges?

It’s hard to describe what it was like to rely on tenuous lease situation for twenty-four years. We had to do everything psychologically to from year to year and not know if we could stay. It’s such a relief to have a building. After we catch our
breath we may want to add an annex. Possibly add the IB program. Other things like staffing, salaries, compensation, and growing the endowment fund will continue to be challenges the board must face.

How do you think the educational policies developed by the board help students achieve the qualities of courage, compassion and commitment, the overarching goal of the mission statement?

Board approval of line items makes it possible to fulfill this purpose. It should be happening for the whole community, it makes it possible for the faculty to do their job. In our mission statement everything we do has a purpose because we try to hire people who are passionate specific fields.

Is there anything you would like to add?

When a child comes in for the first time and has never been in the school before, at the end of the day I ask, how was your day and invariably they say things like, I love this school because everyone gets along with everyone, the teachers seem to care so much or the kids seem so happy here. When I hear that from a stranger who has only been in the school for a couple of hours, I know the mission has taken hold.