



Family-Centered Goal-Setting

Rationale

Effective goal-setting practices are essential for a vibrant learning culture. It helps students recognize they have control over their learning, and goal-setting done well can produce student learning gains of 18-41 percentile points! (Marzano 2009).

Of the four pillars of SEAL, one is “Strong Partnerships between Families and Teachers.” At SEAL, we view families as integral to the lives and education of the children we serve, and we endeavor to centralize the needs of the children through authentic partnership in service of our common goal – students’ educational success. While teachers are experts on instruction and understand what a student needs to progress academically, the truth is that families know their children the best, and we would do well to tap into their expertise. Caregivers accumulate a wealth of knowledge about their children as learners, and they understand the totality of the child’s lived experiences and their Funds of Knowledge.

Partnering with families in goal-setting will boost goal-setting efficacy. It enables teachers to engage caregivers in supporting the children as they work toward their goals. It provides repeated opportunities to build relationships with students and their families in support of specific learning needs. It ensures goals are set based upon a shared understanding of the whole child. And, it is essential for English Learners, if teachers truly want to honor the student’s diversity, assets, and gifts.

Implementation

Family-centered goal-setting must tap four elements:

1. **Providing opportunities to build competence** – Goals look different from student to student. Effective goals are not about achieving academic performance targets or avoiding failure on upcoming skills-based assessments. Rather, they should focus on a mastery orientation for that specific child that will support them to overcome a personal challenge or learning struggle. Goals that focus on skills which can be used at home and in school are the most valuable, as they are developing life-long learning habits and a growth mindset beyond the classroom.
2. **Giving students control/autonomy** - Students must have a choice in selecting goals. Of course, teachers and families should provide guidance about what is relevant and purposeful, however, the student must be motivated to attain the goals.



3. **Cultivating interest** – Goals should be written in such a way that offer opportunities for students to pursue their personal interests as they work toward achieving the goal.
4. **Altering student’s perceptions of their own ability** – By definition, a goal names something the child cannot yet accomplish. It is critical that, with work, the student can attain the goal. The teacher’s role is to define the learning path by providing actionable steps to achieve the goal. Teachers are the “directors of learning,” breaking larger goals down into skill areas, outlining the steps necessary. If it seems students are struggling, it is the teacher who is able to modify the goal so students continue to feel successful.

What is a good goal? Goals must be:

- Simple – Focus on one thing.
- Targeted – What is it and how will you know when you’ve achieved it? Set a firm date.
- Short-term – Goals should be achievable withing 4-6 weeks.

How do you determine the goal? Talk with families and children about their academic and social goals. Asking questions and seeking to build relationships is the best way to uncover possible targets:

- Do you like school? Which parts?
- What is hard for you in your life? At school?
- What do you want to learn or do better?

Factors for Success:

- **Schedule periodic check-ins** – The teacher should check in with students at least weekly. In addition, teachers should check in with families and students regularly during the goal-setting cycle, at least once over a 4 week period. These check-ins allow for conferring or revision of goals to ensure success and prevent students from feeling discouraged. In addition, they keep everyone focused on the goal.
- **Provide feedback on progress** – It is critical that students, families, and teachers are all aligned around progress toward achieving goals. Check-ins provide one way to communicate, however, teachers must intentionally share updates more frequently. In addition, it is important celebrate accomplishments along the way to promote persistence and encourage confidence.
- **Stay in the “zone”** – Goals must be aspirational, yet achievable. Make sure goals are within the child’s zone of proximal development.



- **Start with goals that can be applied in daily life** – This will help students internalize the importance of goal-setting. With younger students (K-1), begin with class wide goals for learning behaviors or skills, so they understand what a goal is and how it contributes to learning. With goal-setting, the process is more important than the goal itself.
- **Make it visual** – Concretize a goal-setting culture. Display anchor charts or graphs showing collective progress (without names or specifics, of course). Revisit charts and progress as part of a set of rituals, including daily intention setting.
- **Model, model, model!!** The most effective teachers model the behavior and mindset they expect from their students. As it relates to goal-setting, they set goals for themselves, monitor progress against them frequently, and reflect on how their daily learning relates to their goals.