

# Set goals

## Where are we now?

**We write student and professional learning goals as a result of careful analysis of student and educator data.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

**We begin our goal-setting process by studying our data summary statements.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Our student and professional learning goals align with our system and school improvement goals and instructional frameworks.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Our educator learning goals identify clearly what improvement we want in our knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Our student learning goals are written in SMART goal format and identify clearly what students will know and be able to do as a result of our changed practices.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

**Our goals guide us toward the appropriate team learning strategies.**

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NO OPINION

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

## Overview

Chapter 3 ended with the creation of data summary statements from which learning team members develop learning goals for their students and themselves. Disaggregating and analyzing data are necessary processes for identifying and understanding learning problems, but they are not sufficient for overcoming challenges. The learning team members need to translate findings into goals for their own learning and student performance. During Stage 2: Set Goals, team members get smart about choosing which gaps they will work to close from those they had identified in the first stage of the cycle.

This chapter shows how teams develop student and educator learning goals. Teams may turn again to Tool 2.2: Reviewing the Learning Cycle to check the indicators they will need in this stage as well as to make sure they have necessary resources and support for setting learning goals for their students and themselves. They also may use Tool 5.5: Designing an Action Plan when they begin to develop goals and complete a plan. The discussion presents a collaborative process for translating a team's data findings into goals that can be used to guide collective learning and actions as well as to establish expectations for overcoming the problems identified by the data. The team will later review these expectations in Stage 5.1: Monitor, assess, and adjust practice. Meanwhile, during the goal-setting stage, team members examine the instructional framework, curriculum guides, and testing schedule as they translate their data findings into a manageable number of goals on which to focus student and educator learning. Examples of learning goals show one format that learning teams can use to craft specific, outcomes-oriented, measurable goals for which they can be accountable in a timely fashion. This book suggests that teams use the SMART

format for student learning goals. Then, in setting educator learning goals, team members identify the particular knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (KASABs) educators need to develop to achieve those student goals. Regardless of the goal format a team, school, or district chooses, the key to successfully managing the goal-setting process is to keep in mind that the format of the goal is less important than the focus. Team members can manage the demands of this stage if they remember, first, to identify their greatest student learning needs and, second, set their own learning goals as a complement to student learning goals.

## How do teams set the right goals?

### Clarify outcomes

Chapter 3 highlights the importance of the Data standard as a benchmark for conducting data analysis. The standard provides a strong rationale and elements of effective data analysis to guide professional learning and student growth. For setting goals the Outcomes standard gives a similar rationale and guidelines for paying attention to both student and educator performance expectations:

**Outcomes:** Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards. (Learning Forward, 2011, p. 23)

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning further explain the importance of focusing on both student and educator learning goals:

Student learning outcomes define equitable expectations for all students to achieve at high levels and hold educators responsible for implementing appropriate strategies to

support student learning. Learning for educators that focuses on student learning outcomes has a positive effect on changing educator practice and increasing student achievement. (Learning Forward, 2011, pp. 49–50)

The standard reinforces the importance of aligning team goals with curriculum and performance priorities. After analyzing data to understand a number of issues affecting student performance, learning teams set goals related to student and educator learning outcomes that guide them toward achieving intended results.

### Translate data into student goals

In “The X Factor is ‘Why,’” Anne Conzemius (2012) says that educators use data as part of their ongoing professional practice to gain perspective on a problem, create focus and monitor progress, and to generate new learning (p. 21). In Chapter 3 the team concluded the data stage by writing data summary statements. These statements summarized the gap between the *desired* state and current state of student performance. In practical terms, a team may use the statements to describe the desired state as it may relate to system, school, or team aspirations. Translating student and educator data into useful data summary statements is only meaningful if it leads to well-informed action that achieves better results. The data show where students *are*. In goal setting, educators look at where they want students *to be*. And along with defining student expectations, educators think about where they need to be in terms of their own learning.

Anne Jolly (2008) offers a reminder that well-formed instructional goals create a sense of purpose among team members:

The learning team accomplishes good things for students because teachers focus their collective energy on an instructional goal

that addresses specific student needs. Teams without a clear goal may meet faithfully and share, swap, and exchange information and activities, but their lack of purpose, generally, guarantees that they wind up nowhere in particular.

A strong sense of purpose and a clear goal also keep teams on track. Daily brush fires and competing responsibilities coupled with the demands of teaching tug at teachers’ energy levels and compete for their time. . . . Concrete, targeted goals, along with short-term milestones, give teams the sense of accomplishment they need to maintain teachers’ energy level and motivation. (p. 53)

Discussing data statements should lead a team first to be able to answer the question, “What student learning gaps are most urgent as we look at our vision and instructional priorities?” Team members then use the answer to this question to inform the student goal that will guide the remaining stages of the cycle. Next, the team begins to answer the question: “And how will we know?” Forming clear answers to this question is a critical step to writing clear goals that will lead to well-aligned assessments and lessons (see Tool 4.1: Deciding on a Team Focus for a resource to prepare for setting learning goals for students and educators).

The following example shows how to move from data summaries to goal setting. Here is one of the summary statements at the end of Chapter 3:

Across all sixth-grade classes, 72% of girls are proficient in problem solving, while 64% of boys are proficient in problem solving.

The gap shows that a subset of students, namely boys, are lagging behind in this area. As the team considers how to frame its goal, it is building its plan to achieve one particular student learning target to close the gap revealed by the data.

### Approaches to goal setting

Sometimes districts prefer or require that student goals be written toward specific approaches to goal setting: accountability, attainment, and growth.

#### Accountability

These goals focus on meeting an externally set level of performance as opposed to achieving proficiency or some level of improvement in their ability to solve problems. The following is an example of an accountability goal:

- 80% of our 6th-grade students will meet or exceed math standards in problem solving by the end of the first trimester.

#### Attainment

These goals dictate what and how students demonstrate attainment of a particular standard or competency at the conclusion of a period of study. Here is an example stated as an attainment goal:

- By the end of the first six weeks, all students will demonstrate 85% proficiency in using the most appropriate problem-solving technique(s) for solving a variety of challenges (or tasks) across content areas.

#### Growth

These goals dictate the acceptable percentage of improvement students demonstrate at the conclusion of a period of study. Here is a sample stated as a growth goal:

- By the end of the first six weeks, all students will demonstrate increasing levels of proficiency in problem-solving by using the most appropriate technique(s) for solving a variety of challenges (or tasks) across content areas.

**And some goals may contain elements of all three types.**

After discussion, the initial student learning goal might be:

- All 6th-grade math students will achieve a proficient level or above on six-week benchmark assessments by selecting and applying appropriate strategies to solve grade and standards-specific problems.
  - Specific: problem-solving strategies
  - Measurable: benchmark assessment
  - Attainable: proficient
  - Results-oriented: grade and standards-specific problems
  - Time-bound: six weeks

In addition, the male students will demonstrate proficiency in each new problem-solving strategy on weekly assessments. The team assumes that if students strengthen their problem-solving skills, then they will improve in ways relevant to the gap identified in the data summary above. Checking progress on the weekly assessments addresses the gender performance gap identified in the data analysis. If males aren't making appropriate progress toward the benchmark, teachers may identify additional support and/or interventions.

The goal shows a strong orientation toward results with a specific outcome and it is measurable in more than one way. See sidebar, "Approaches to goal setting."

To read how one teacher team handled goal setting, see the vignette, "Goal-setting process challenges high-achieving school," on page 51.

### Create intentional educator learning goals

After reaching consensus on the student learning goal, team members must do the same for the educator learning goal. They will collaboratively identify what skills and knowledge they individually and collectively need to help students achieve this goal. Their learning goals answer the question, "What do educators

need to know and be able to do to ensure students achieve their learning outcomes?” Responding thoroughly to this question keeps the team on the right track for success. In too many cycles of inquiry or improvement, teams may collaborate to write SMART goals for students, but skip the stage of writing goals for themselves.

However, even when teams do write their own learning goals, they must address more than educator knowledge and skills. In *Assessing Impact* (2008), Joellen Killion outlines the various types of change that learning may lead to. By considering the full range of the KASAB model — changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors — as they set learning goals, teams create the potential for transformational change in schools. If educators identify only the knowledge and skills they will gain, they ignore the importance of their beliefs, expectations, and behaviors in teaching and learning.

Teachers want their students to meet or exceed performance standards. Teachers believe their students are capable, although they realize that not all students are successful. Teachers have many views regarding the reasons for learning challenges faced by their students. Some of these reasons are outside and others are within teachers’ control. In their classrooms, however, they can transform what happens between themselves and students. They can decide how they approach instruction and assessment. They can shift their own knowledge, skills, practices, beliefs, and attitudes about teaching. Holding high expectations; knowing their content deeply; and finding, testing, and applying the right designs all are within a teacher’s control. As committed lifelong learners, teachers recognize that they can always continue to learn so they may help their students continue to improve.

Taking time to be deliberate about defining their own learning goals ensures that teacher learning

teams invest their time well so they are more likely to achieve the outcomes they want for their students. In the following example of an educator learning goal, team members directly connect to the student learning goal. The teacher learning goal will consider the knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors (KASABs) necessary to achieve the student learning goal. For example:

- By the end of the learning team cycle, team members will understand grade-specific standards and problem-solving strategies and will design and implement instruction and then use observation and evidence from student work to revise and improve.
  - Knowledge: understand the grade-specific standards and problem-solving strategies
  - Attitude: belief that all students will be successful
  - Skills: use new knowledge and student work to inform the process of designing, teaching, critiquing, reflecting and revising instruction
  - Aspiration: expect all students to be successful
  - Behavior: teachers and then students demonstrate application of grade and standard-specific problem solving strategies

### Right-size the goal

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The cycle of learning is a continuous process; in the best case, it repeats itself several times during the school year. Learning teams will start the year planning to complete a certain number of cycles according to the time allocated for their work together. While a team may identify a specific number of cycles a year, team members also recognize that circumstances beyond their control may affect the schedule. By first identifying a desirable and realistic number of learning cycles, the group will better be able to determine the breadth of the goals it can tackle together. In some

When writing S.M.A.R.T. goals ask yourself:	
<b>S</b>	<b>Specific:</b>
What will students and teacher achieve?	
<b>M</b>	<b>Measurable:</b>
How will it be measured?	
<b>A</b>	<b>Attainable:</b>
Are the goals realistic for students?	
<b>R</b>	<b>Results-based:</b>
Are the goals oriented toward clear outcomes?	
<b>T</b>	<b>Time-bound:</b>
Do we know when students will be expected to demonstrate attainment of goals?	

cases, the time allocated for teams is limited to a few days a year; those teams may only be able to partially complete one learning cycle. Teams that meet daily or weekly are best positioned to complete more cycles per year.

Although teams may begin the year by planning to address many goals together, they recognize that they may need to adjust their goals to the rhythm of the meetings. Limitations on their schedules will motivate teams to make choices among the range of student learning needs to address the highest priorities. Team members also realize that the more time they give themselves to complete the cycle, the bigger their goals can be. Finally, in addition to spending team learning time together, members probably will agree that each one of them will spend time learning and working

independently toward the same goals. Members may use quarterly or six-week check-ins for shared learning, as well, to monitor and support progress. Some schools set aside monthly learning team opportunities that may allow a team to consider completing two to three cycles per year.

As teams engage in the cycle of learning, they will arrive at a point in the school calendar when recent assessments are available; the results may guide their decisions about where to focus next. In some cases, goals may not change if assessments demonstrate the students have not mastered the goals the teachers had set previously. So while the team members may retain the same goals, they will likely change the teaching and learning strategies for achieving them.

Another scenario may find a team reaching agreement on a set of student learning goals but differentiating their learning goals according to the needs of the team members. In such a scenario the team may split into smaller subgroups when they engage in the individual or collaborative professional learning stage.

### Use the SMART goal-writing format

According to Anne Conzemius and Jan O’Neill (2013), most educators state goals in terms of process rather than results. Process goals tend to “focus on the activities, programs, strategies, and methods that educators want to engage in. . . . Results goals answer the *so-what* question: So what if we did all these things? What actual improvement would we expect or want to see?”

... Professional learning for teachers and principals is the means to achieve the goal of increased student achievement, so extend the traditional student achievement goal to include the end result of professional learning. (p. 244)

Today almost everyone is familiar with the “SMART” phrase, attributed to Peter Drucker’s management-by-objectives approach some 60 years ago, although the term first appeared in a 1981 issue of *Management Review* in an article entitled, “There’s a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management’s Goals and Objectives,” by George Doran, Arthur Miller, and James Cunningham. New interpretations of the acronym abound as educators use it to strengthen their goal-setting process.

For the purpose of the learning team cycle, teams may use the SMART format for writing goals (see sidebar, “When writing SMART goals, ask yourself:”). Understanding how to apply these terms is a critical skill for writing powerful and compelling goal statements:

**Specific** goals focus precisely on the needs of students for whom the goal is aimed. And although “specific” is important, powerful goals are also systemic, strategic, and stretching. Team members have access to a vision, standards for student learning, curriculum and instructional frameworks, they can collect and disaggregate data to identify commonalities and differences among student groups. Finally, they pinpoint areas for focus.

**Measurable** goals contain information about how much of a change will be made and how a change will be calculated or reported. Demonstrations, student work, and formative assessments all offer opportunities for meaningful evidence of results. The goal statement may even reference a particular tool or instrument that will be used to report results (e.g. portfolio or benchmark assessment).

**Attainable** goals include actions that the team can control or influence and that can be accomplished with existing resources. Goals must be achievable within the time period assigned to them. At the same time expectations must be high to inspire thoughtful

action. The team also needs to strike a balance between goals that are too easy or too hard to reach in the time frame allotted. The team setting the goal identifies a baseline when determining whether a goal is attainable. The team also needs to know how much time and what other resources are available to accomplish the goal.

**Results-based** goals identify specific outcomes that are measurable or observable. Goals clearly state what students will know and be able to do. Results could be expressed as attaining a certain level of student achievement in a content area, an increase in the number of students who improve in a certain area, or as improved performance as defined and measured by a performance rubric or clear criteria.

**Time-bound** goals identify the amount of time required to accomplish them. The goals are right sized according to the time allotted for achieving them. Goals are sometimes more compelling when there is a sense of urgency attached to them. A predetermined timeframe can create a sense of urgency and make the goal a priority to staff and students (Roy, 2007, p. 3).

In general, the SMART goal format gives learning teams a powerful tool to help determine which of their efforts is making a difference, encourage them to set benchmarks to monitor progress, and identify specific evaluation measures. While teams may choose — or be required — to set both teacher and student learning goals using the SMART format, the range of changes outlined in the KASAB model described above more fully address the many ways educators must grow. The sidebar on page 50 shows a few examples of learning goals for students and teachers (see also Tool 4.2: Preparing to write SMART Student Learning Goals for additional resources on writing SMART goals).

### Student learning goal

By the end of the first six weeks, all 6th-grade students will demonstrate 85% proficiency in using the most appropriate problem-solving technique(s) for solving a variety of challenges (or tasks) across content areas.

### Educator learning goal

Teachers will identify and study four different problem-solving techniques, determine criteria for best application of each, design and teach five lessons that ask students to apply the criteria to the problems, adjust instruction in response to student needs, and provide student work that demonstrates mastery of the goal.

### Student learning goal

80% of our 8th-grade students will meet or exceed writing standards in organization and voice by the end of first trimester.

### Educator learning goal

Teachers will review the critical elements of organization and voice, design writing assignments that advance student understanding, and provide student work that demonstrates mastery of the goal.

## Sequence educator and student goals

Student learning goals are essential to identifying teacher learning goals; however, teachers must act on their goals before they can expect to achieve the student learning goals. In their planning, teachers posit that if they were to gain certain knowledge and skills through intentional learning, their practice would shift and student learning would improve in specific ways. In other words, for teacher learning to shape student learning, teacher learning will precede student learning. Furthermore, unless teachers learn how to successfully apply their new learning to improve their instruction, they can expect little in terms of better results for students. This relationship is another reason that goal setting is so important: Advance planning for team and student learning is a critical step in achieving the outcomes.

## Taking action

With an understanding of the key concepts underlying student and educator goal setting, teams are ready to work through the following steps to set student and educator learning goals:

### 1. Review summary statements and set priorities

Goal setting will occur several times a year. A school-based learning team likely has school goals as well as data and summary statements to consider at the end or beginning of the year when it is setting goals for the new school year. To complete that work, the team may use benchmark, formative assessments, and other forms of student work to guide adjustments to annual goals as well as to set goals for shorter learning cycles. (The process for adjusting goals will be addressed in Chapter 5).



## Goal-setting process challenges high-achieving school

Teachers collaborate on goals that challenge the students and themselves to deepen learning.

Dry Creek is one of 43 elementary schools in a large, diverse, suburban district outside Denver, Colorado. Located in an

affluent neighborhood, Dry Creek serves 420 students and has been recognized for its academic excellence, including earning the Governor’s Distinguished Improvement Award for Growth for the second time in 2014.

During the 2015–16 school year, Dry Creek experienced a change in leadership. The new principal believed that a professional learning community implementing a learning cycle could have powerful results on student learning. Since the district was encouraging all schools to develop models of improvement, the principal reached out to a district coordinator of professional learning to help deepen learning at the school site.

Teachers took the first step, which was to set student learning goals that would guide teams’ yearlong collaborative work. Because teachers were already familiar with setting SMART goals, the teams set goals without much guidance, using primarily their professional expertise and grade-level standards to guide the goal writing. One example of a goal set by a primary team during this first draft was, “80% of students will use a period at the end of their sentences.”

But after reviewing all of the teams’ goals through a vertical lens, the principal noticed that the goals, if achieved, would maintain rather than push the student learning status quo. She realized that teachers needed to be given permission to take risks and set goals that were just beyond their students’ current reach. So, she and the district coordinator crafted guiding questions that would challenge teams to consider how each stated goal would affect student learning. Teachers were especially thoughtful when asked whether the current goal reflected a learning outcome that students typically were unable to achieve given current

### Dry Creek Elementary School (Centennial, Colorado)

Founded.....	1972
District/Area .....	Cherry Creek School District #5
Neighborhood.....	Suburban Denver
Student enrollment.....	420
Demographics:	
Black.....	3.2%
Hispanic.....	8.2%
White.....	68%
Other.....	20.6%
Free or Reduced-Priced Lunch.....	11%
English Language Learners .....	5%
Special Education .....	7%
Attendance.....	96.3%

instructional practices? Or as they analyzed their data, did the teachers think the stated goal was one that students already were close to achieving?

With a shift in thinking, the teachers rewrote goals that encouraged them to dream big for their students. When the team members who initially wrote the punctuation-focused SMART goal reviewed student writing samples, they saw that students, in general, understood how to apply the mechanics of writing, but were struggling to creatively express themselves. With their new awareness, the teacher team revised their goal to read: “100% of students will communicate their intended message through focused writing that has a clear meaning.” Reflecting the shared perspective of several of her colleagues, one team member said, “Looking at student data around *this* goal is much more engaging for me as a teacher than reviewing data about the punctuation habits of our students.”

And now that the teams had revised the goals to reflect their more meaningful, data-based vision for student learning, teachers could begin to expand their definition of collaborative work to include learning with and from one another to reach the ambitious goals that they had set for students.

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Kellie Randall, professional learning coordinator*

A team considers the school vision, goals, and instructional priorities as well as its own summary statements when it begins the process of goal setting, using this information to identify general priorities. Team members focus on the highest need in establishing these priorities before translating summary statements into specific goals for students and teachers. Teams may revisit Tool 4.1: Deciding on a Team Focus for a protocol to guide the discussion.

## 2. Write student goals

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Teams translate their student goals into the SMART format (see Tool 4.3: Writing Student and Team Learning Goals for help in the process).

A previous discussion in this chapter covers an example of a student SMART learning goal. The following is an additional goal with the SMART elements tagged:

- **Student:** By the end of the **fourth six weeks (T)** students will be able to **demonstrate appropriate use (M) of visual models (R)** including fraction bars, number lines, and area models **to correctly solve 80 percent (A) of problems requiring multiplication and division of fractions (S)**. (engageNY, 2014, paras. 1–2)

## 3. Write educator goals

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Based on the student learning goal they set, team members craft their learning goals so that they address their own needs regarding not only knowledge and skills but also aspirations, attitudes, and behaviors, as outlined above in the discussion about KASAB. The following is an additional goal, highlighting elements of the KASAB model.

- **Teacher:** Team members will study concepts, share new insights, (K, S) and demonstrate appropriate use (B) of visual models including fraction bars, number lines, and area models to show the quotient of whole numbers and fractions. Team members will design, critique, and finalize five one-week lessons, (B) to use with students during the fourth six weeks. Team members will expect all students to be able to engage with these strategies and be prepared to shift practices based on individual student needs (A, A).

## 4. Review with others

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Throughout this stage, especially, teams benefit from having strong relationships with individuals who can offer different points of view and support. During the goal-setting stage teams consider the perspectives of other teams, school-based coaches, principals, and district curriculum staff (see Tool 4.4: Checking Student and Team Learning Goals to review and finalize learning goals).

In summary, teams may think about making their goals public by sharing them with other teams, students, and parents. They may find it helpful to remember that high expectations yield higher outcomes. Team members should not feel ashamed or suffer loss of self-esteem if they set high expectations for students and fall short. Instead, they must hold to their shared commitment and will to attain their goals and to do that they need opportunities to assess, adjust, and try again.

## Reflections

- We are clear on how to align student and team learning goals with our system and school priorities and instructional framework.
- We write SMART goals for student learning.
- We can translate student learning goals into team learning goals that address knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors.
- We are competent in writing goals that provide guidance for learning and assessing impact of our work together.
- We have a reasonable framework to guide the development and implementation of our learning goals.

## References

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## Tools index for chapter 4

Tool	Title	Use
4.1	Deciding on a team focus	Use this resource to support development of the team learning goal.
4.2	Preparing to write SMART student learning goals	Use this resource to gain additional perspectives on writing SMART format for student learning goals.
4.3	Writing student and team learning goals	Use this resource to guide writing of student SMART learning goals and teacher team KASAB learning goals.
4.4	Checking student and team learning goals	Use this tool to review and finalize learning goals.