## INTRODUCTION

Goal setting is defined, very simply, as the process of selecting a target or objective and devising a plan to achieve that objective. It is an important part of both the personal and professional growth process. However, what often is overlooked in the goal-setting process is the science and strategy of how to design goals that motivate people to raise the bar and reach the next milestone in the path to success. In education specifically, it is very important that the goals we set for increasing achievement consider critical challenge areas, contextual factors that either support or impede the work, and the timeline for change. This guide provides notes and thoughtful questions to consider when articulating **specific, measurable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals.**
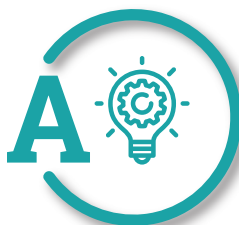
Specific   **Measurable**   **Actionable**   **Relevant**   **Time-Bound**

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BE VERY CLEAR ON THE CHALLENGE

Before setting goals, clearly define the challenge the team will address. Consider exercises such as fishbone diagrams or theory of change activities that identify the areas of practice that need the most attention or root cause to target. District leadership teams also can use the Future Ready Schools® (FRS) five-step planning process to assess their district's readiness to implement effective student- centered learning. Results from that survey process will identify strengths as well as challenge areas. Once the district identifies key areas for improvement, it is time to set goals. The notes and guiding questions in the remainder of this document will help leadership teams articulate SMART goals for their change effort.

SET FUTURE READY SMART GOALS

SMART goals are not like long-term or short-term goals. Long-term goals describe future aspirations such as getting a job, earning a master's degree, or improving high school graduation rates. Short-term goals define the steps to attaining large-scale achievements and provide interim benchmarks to reaching the ultimate milestone. Setting SMART goals can be viewed as a process for refining either short- or long- term goals. It ensures that a team's efforts are targeted, manageable, and well-aligned to a desired outcome. For educators, setting SMART goals should consider the larger school community and the activities or initiatives currently in place. The process ensures that the goals meet the needs of students, teachers, parents, and other members of the school community. SMART goals also should link to the school or district's strategic plan. The following sections describe the components of a SMART goal and provide guiding questions to consider.

- **Create clear details on the actions the district will take to achieve the goal.**
- **Each level of detail will ensure the intended focus is clear.**

Specific

Specific goals have a much greater chance of being accomplished than general goals. Specific goals clearly identify what the district intends to do and the impact those efforts will have on a particular challenge.

Specific goals answer the following questions:

1. Who is involved?
2. What do I/we want to accomplish?
3. Where will the action take place?
4. When will the goal be achieved?
5. Why is this goal important?

M Measurable

- **Articulate milestones or benchmarks to measure progress, stay motivated, and evaluate success.**

When a goal is measurable, it has clear indicators of progress. Measurable goals keep teams accountable to their original intentions and provide a way to evaluate improvement. When writing a SMART goal, establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward attaining specific milestones.

Measurable goals answer the following questions:

1. How many?
2. How much?
3. To what degree?
4. How will I know when the goal is accomplished?
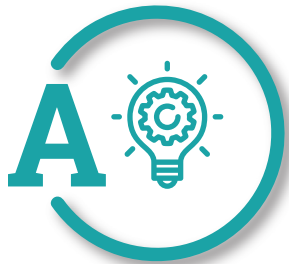
A Actionable

- **Be reasonable. Don't write an impossible goal.**
- **Consider the district's current context and leverage points.**
- **The goal should be challenging yet attainable.**

Sometimes goals are well written but not actionable or achievable. To create an achievable goal, consider the scope of the work needed to accomplish the goal relative to the resources available. Identify the most important outcomes to accomplish and set a challenging, but not impossible, benchmark for reaching that outcome.

Actionable/achievable goals answer the following questions:

1. What resources are available to help us reach this goal?
2. What programs or supports are in place that I/we can leverage?
3. Given our expected timeline, can we accomplish this goal or should we refine it?

Relevant

- **The goal focuses on a critical need or problem of practice.**
- **The goal has a strategic target.**

Relevant goals consider the learning context and the challenges that affect students, teachers, parents and the community. Goals that are relevant align to the district's priority challenges, connect to the work currently happening in a school or district, and focus on making a direct impact.

Relevant goals answer the following questions:

1. Does the goal connect directly to a school or district initiative?
2. Does the goal connect to a specific student outcome?
3. Does the goal represent the opinions of key members of the school community such as students, teachers, and parents?

Time-Bound

- **Setting a timeline creates motivation and urgency.**
- **Use the timeline associated with the overall action plan to guide the timeline for individual goals.**

Any effective goal must have a target date. If that goal is SMART, though, the timeline aligns with the school/district calendar, any existing strategic plans or initiatives, and creates a sense of urgency for meeting a specific objective. Timelines and deadlines set too far in the future invite procrastination. When writing SMART goals, consider the timelines of current projects, the workload of the leaders and staff members who will execute the goal, and any schedule parameters already in place in the school/district.

Time-bound goals answer the following questions:

1. Is the timeline specific with a clear start and end date?
2. Does the deadline align with other plans within the school or district?
3. Does the goal make room for incremental benchmarks?