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Preface

Introduction

Can we boost student achievement through improved teacher work? Can we document student growth over time and thus improve student learning? In *Student Achievement Goal Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning*, we focus on improving student achievement through academic goal setting—a process in which teachers:

- ◆ Determine benchmark performance for the students.
- ◆ Set achievement goals based on where the students begin.
- ◆ Monitor progress throughout the academic year or other learning period.
- ◆ Measure performance at the end of the year.

Thus, student achievement goal setting provides a fair, realistic, and feasible method to implement instruction to increase student achievement in any school or classroom.

In advocating student achievement goal setting, we do not mean the traditional professional goals in which teachers or other educators set “personal growth” goals. By all means, we encourage educators to continue their growth, but we focus on growth that is defined and aimed explicitly at improved student performance. If the goal (or any school-based activity, for that matter) doesn’t improve or contribute to the quality of life of a child, we probably shouldn’t be investing our scarce resources in it. For us, the phrase “student achievement goal setting” means focusing instruction, assessment, professional development, and, in fact, the full array of teacher endeavors on improving student achievement. By achievement, we don’t necessarily mean an end-of-year benchmark state test. Although this is one measure of student (and teacher) success, we are more interested in making student achievement goal setting applicable to the broad range of what students should know and be able to do. After all, this is what our job as educators is all about.

Finally, we want to emphasize that our goal in this goal-setting book is not to bring you one more personal theory or idea on how to instruct students or improve student learning. It seems we have enough untested theories, ideas, and methods already. Instead, what we need as a profession is to inform our teaching and learning experiences with the most applicable research available, and that is our

intent in *Student Achievement Goal Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning*. Although we don't believe that this new text is the definitive answer to improved teaching and learning, we do hope we are able to provide you, our reader, with a solid plank in the bridge connecting research and good practice.

How the Book Is Organized

The book is organized into three sections:

- ◆ Part I provides a conceptual framework and explains how to implement student achievement goal setting.
- ◆ Part II offers numerous sample goals, cutting across various grade levels and subject areas as well as professional positions.
- ◆ Part III includes an annotated bibliography of key publications that are related to the concepts and practice of student achievement goal setting.

Chapter 1 of Part I explains how goal setting for student achievement works and also provides empirical research to support the practice. In Chapter 2 we move to a thorough review and explanation, accompanied by numerous examples of how goal setting really works when it is focused on improving student performance. Chapter 3 adds insight and practice-based guidance for how to assess students in goal setting. In Chapter 4, we offer guidance to consider before, during, and after implementation of student achievement goal setting.

Part II of the book provides examples both of student achievement goals set by teachers and of student achievement and/or program goals set by educational specialists such as guidance counselors, library or media specialists, and a host of others who impact students through their work. A chart is provided that details the position of the professional, the school level, and the subject or program area addressed by the goal. The reader is free to find an example that best suits his or her educational position.

Part III of the book provides an annotated bibliography of selected publications, along with a matrix that relates the publications to various aspects of student achievement goal setting. Our intent is to offer a user-friendly source for those who want to explore the concepts and research underlying student achievement goal setting.

Uses for the Book

Student achievement goal setting focuses on the value that teachers and educational specialists add to the learning process and to educational programs. *Student Achievement Goal Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning* equips educational professionals with the necessary tools and with a plan of action so that they can use student achievement data to improve instructional practice and increase

student achievement. The book can be a valuable resource for the following audiences:

- ◆ Teachers, including classroom teachers, resource teachers, and teachers in other settings, who desire to improve their own teaching and their students' learning;
- ◆ Educational specialists who support student learning through administration of educational programs and who know the value they bring to the educational process;
- ◆ Teacher leaders who are in a position to positively impact teacher practice through their support and expertise;
- ◆ Administrators who supervise and support teachers; and
- ◆ Staff development specialists who plan and deliver training focused on improving instructional practices.

It is our sincere hope that *Student Achievement Goal Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning* benefits your school, your teaching practices, and, most importantly, your students.

What Is Student Achievement Goal Setting?

Introduction

Why do we have schools? Other than safety, we can identify only two reasons why schooling exists as an enterprise:

Reason 1: Teaching and learning

Reason 2: Supporting teaching and learning

The only justification for public (or private, for that matter) education to exist is to improve the quality of life of our students, and the primary way we do this is by helping them learn to read, to understand math, to appreciate the world around them, to be prepared to productively participate in their world, to live healthy and happy lives, and so forth. In other words, everything we do in education—everything—should positively touch the life of a child.

In *Student Achievement Goal Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning* we focus on the ultimate goal of education—improved student achievement. In this introductory chapter, we summarize the research supporting student achievement goal setting in the classroom and discuss how teachers set appropriate goals based on relevant data. More specifically, in this opening chapter we discuss the following questions related to student achievement goal setting:

- ◆ What is it?
- ◆ How does it work?
- ◆ Why use it?
- ◆ What does the research say about it?

- ◆ How does it relate to formative assessment?

We address each of these key questions in turn.

Student Achievement Goal Setting: What Is It?

Related Definitions

Assessment for Learning:

“Assessment for learning is any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students’ learning. It thus differs from assessment designed primarily to serve the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence.”²

Curriculum-Based Measurement:

A term used in special education circles in which student needs are assessed in terms of what they should be able to learn and be able to do, teachers set goals in the individualized education plan (IEP) based on perceived gaps, and then teachers continually monitor student progress and make adjustments as needed.³

Progress Monitoring:

“First, teachers determine the students’ current levels of performance... Second, teachers use the students’ current levels of performance to establish ambitious but realistic achievement goals... Third, teachers determine the rate of progress.”⁴

We reiterate that student achievement goal setting exists for two reasons: improving student learning and supporting teachers in their work with students. We will discuss the former throughout the book, but the latter deserves explanation. One approach to linking student achievement to teacher performance involves building the capacity for teachers and their supervisors to interpret and use student achievement data to set target goals for student improvement. Indeed, school districts across the United States and other countries have incorporated student achievement goal setting as one measure of student progress.¹ Setting goals—not just any goals, but goals focused squarely on student performance—is a powerful way to enhance professional performance and, in turn, positively impact student achievement.

Student achievement goal setting is sometimes described as “student progress monitoring.” Student progress monitoring has been described as a process in which:

...the teacher determines a student’s current performance level on skills that the student will be learning that school year, identifies achievement goals that the student needs to reach by the end of the year, and establishes the rate of progress the student must make to meet those goals. The teacher then measures the student’s academic progress regularly (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) using probes, which are brief and easily administered measures.⁵

These steps provide a succinct definition of student achievement goal setting.

How Does Student Achievement Goal Setting Work?

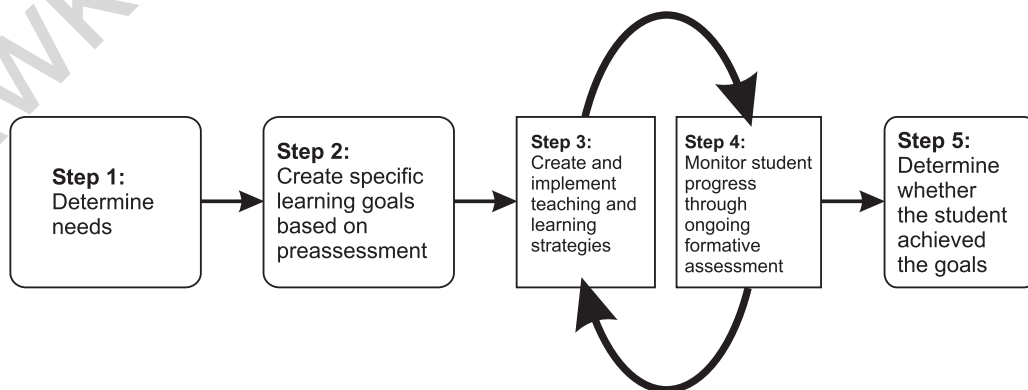
In practical terms, the student achievement goal-setting process can be depicted in the following five steps (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1. Student Achievement Goal-Setting Process

- ◆ Step 1: What is the starting point for student learning (i.e., documenting where students begin their learning)?
- ◆ Step 2: What reasonable, but measurable, goals should they be expected to achieve, given where they start?
- ◆ Step 3: What specific teaching strategies should be used with specific students?
- ◆ Step 4: Where are the students in terms of achieving their desired learning goals throughout the instructional period? What mid-point corrective action should be taken to enhance student learning (i.e., what adjustments to instruction can be made to enhance learning)?
- ◆ Step 5: Where are students at the end of the year/term/unit of instruction?

Student achievement goal setting begins with knowing where students are in relation to what is expected of them. This allows teachers to set specific, measurable goals based on both the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the students. The next part of the process is recursive in that the teacher creates and implements strategies and monitors the progress of those strategies. As progress is monitored, the teacher makes adjustments to the teaching and learning strategies. Finally, a summative judgment is made regarding student learning for a specified period of time. The process looks similar to Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2



Special Education: A Special Case for Goal Setting

Special education instruction can be considered a special kind of student goal setting. For special education students, the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires an integration between assessment and instruction. Additionally, IDEA mandates that each IEP include a statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to meet the child's individual needs.⁶ Additionally, IDEA requires a description of how the child's progress toward meeting these goals will be measured.⁷ In essence, special educators are required to deliver differentiated instruction that is specified in IEPs and which includes procedures for assessing student progress toward goals.⁸ According to Fuchs and colleagues, this goal-setting process is defined by frequent curriculum-based measurement and evaluation.⁹

Although full-blown IEPs for all students may not be feasible, nonetheless, it is a close hybrid that we advocate for all students—a process in which we know where our students begin, what we can do to help them maximize their learning, whether our instructional strategies are succeeding, and, most importantly, how well our students have actually learned. This is student achievement goal setting.

Why Student Achievement Goal Setting?

We know that teachers have a definite and powerful impact on student learning and academic performance.¹⁰ In this vein, student achievement goal setting allows teachers to focus attention on students and on instructional improvement through the process of determining baseline performance, developing strategies for improvement, and assessing results at the end of the academic year. More specifically, the intent of student achievement goal setting is the following:

- ◆ To make explicit the connection between teaching and learning,
- ◆ To make instructional decisions based on student data,
- ◆ To provide a tool for school improvement,
- ◆ To increase effectiveness of instruction through continuous professional growth,
- ◆ To focus attention on student results, and, ultimately,
- ◆ To increase student achievement.¹¹

That all children can learn is “an implicit belief that most teachers share, and it is a belief that should drive all teachers' efforts in the classroom with each and every child, each and every day.”¹² This is precisely the reason that we advocate for setting rigorous yet realistic achievement goals for all students. We should not only

believe that all children can learn but also *expect* all students to learn, and we should create a structure for them through which learning can occur.

The Power of Student Achievement Goal Setting: What Does the Research Say?

Goal setting based on student achievement data is supported by solid research in the field (see, for example, Cawelti, 2004; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Walberg, 1984).¹³ Good and Brophy stated in their summary of effective classroom practices that “setting goals and making a commitment to trying to reach these goals increases performance.”¹⁴ They found that goal setting is particularly effective under the following conditions:

- ◆ The goals are proximal rather than distal (goals are oriented to the here-and-now rather than to some ultimate goal for the distant future, although it is important to make students conscious of the connection between here-and-now tasks and the accomplishment of ultimate goals).
- ◆ The goals are specific (but not too specific) rather than global.
- ◆ The goals are challenging (difficult but reachable rather than too easy or too hard).¹⁵

A number of well-established instructional strategies have been found to yield significantly improved student learning, and these strategies offer methods that closely parallel the student achievement goal-setting process, including methods that are related to direct impact on student learning and others that are related to school improvement.

Goal Setting: Impact on Student Learning

Goal Setting and Increased Student Achievement

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, in their work on research-based strategies for increasing student achievement, analyzed studies that showed percentile gains when using student goal setting ranging from 18 to 41.¹⁶ Additionally, they drew the following three generalizations from the research on goal setting:

- ◆ Instructional goals narrow what students focus on. This means that although students generally score higher on the information related to a specific academic goal, they usually score lower—by approximately 8 percentile points—on information that is incidental to the goal but still covered in the class.