

ACTIVITY 4.1

WRITING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GOALS

Purpose and Objectives

A good action plan improves a few key areas of student achievement that all stakeholders agree are the priority areas of concern. These priority areas emerge from the needs assessment and the data analysis discussions. In Module 2, the school determined “achievement results or findings” and focus areas based on those findings. In this activity, the school will transform those data statements into annual student achievement goals for each focus area.

Specifically, participants will

- * learn the criteria for a student achievement goal,
- * practice writing clear and concise student achievement goals, and
- * create student achievement goals that address the data statements in the focus areas.

Background for Facilitators

Rationale

Many schools jump directly from the needs assessment to choosing strategies and actions without first identifying desired changes in student achievement or behavior. By not setting specific growth targets, schools sidestep accountability. To ensure that a plan will make a difference for students, a school team must define the achievement target they hope to reach when undertaking specific actions. This activity focuses on student achievement goals, but a school could also have goals related to student behavior, such as improved attendance, decreased discipline referrals, or a higher graduation rate.

Schmoker (1999) warns that schools should only have one or possibly two goals for each focus area such as reading, math or behavior. Schools do not have time to adequately address all possible areas well. Data-driven decision-making means taking focused, targeted action to address identified needs. As a result of this activity, schools will write annual student achievement goals. These goals say that if we, as a school, execute our plan well, at the end of the school year we expect our students to achieve at the specified levels on a particular assessment. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation mandates that states set annual growth targets in the form of Annual Yearly Progress. The school will want to align its goals with state or federal targets and, at the same time, ensure that it addresses school-specific findings based on grade-level or subject-area data.

Source

This activity was developed by WestEd facilitators.

Reference

Schmoker, M. J. (1999). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement* (2nd Ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Uses

This activity is appropriate for the full school staff. It should be used after extensive analysis of evidence and student achievement data, but it requires little prior knowledge on the part of most participants. Findings from within and across grade-level and subject-area analyses should be available to participants.

There are many sets of criteria for student achievement goals. All handouts and overheads are designed for one set of criteria. If your school, district, or organization has a different set of criteria, it can easily be substituted on the handouts and overheads.

Activity Directions

Materials

- ⇒ Handout 4.1-1: Writing Student Achievement Goals
- ⇒ Overhead 4.1-1: Criteria for a Measurable Student Achievement Goal
- ⇒ Overhead 4.1-2: Sample Student Achievement Goals
- ⇒ Handout 4.1-2: Practice Goals Worksheet
- ⇒ Overhead 4.1-3: Practice Goals Worksheet
- ⇒ Template 4.1-1: Student Achievement Goals Worksheet

Time Required

Approximately 1.25 hours

Directions for Facilitators

- * **Before the Activity:** If a different set of criteria for student achievement goals is to be used, revise the handouts and overheads accordingly. Use the data statements from previous analyses of student achievement data and information about target areas for change from Activity 2.2 to fill in the Focus Areas and the Data Statements ahead of time on Template 4.1-1 (Student Achievement Goals Worksheet). Gather information on your state's NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress requirements to share with staff during the activity. Make an overhead and handouts of the partially completed worksheet.
- * **(20 minutes)** Begin by explaining that to focus their planning process the staff needs to establish measurable annual goals. Tell participants that when they implement their plan they will also establish interim targets to show they are making progress toward the annual goal. For now, they need to set annual goals in each of their focus areas to address areas of low performance schoolwide or for subgroups of the school population. Pass out Handout 4.1-1 (Writing Student Achievement Goals). Show participants Overhead 4.1-1 (Criteria for a Measurable Student Achievement Goal). Explain each criterion. Emphasize that a goal must be achievable and must also be designed to hold the school accountable for making a significant difference in student achievement. Show the sample student achievement goals on Overhead 4.1-2 (Sample Student Achievement Goals). Describe how each goal meets the criteria. Point out how one of the goals states the degree to which the achievement gap will be closed. Tell participants that if they have identified gaps between subgroups in their data, it will be important to specify how the school will know the performance gaps are closing.

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- * (15 minutes) Ask participants to work in groups to revise the Sample Goals in the left-hand column of Handout 4.1-2 (Practice Goals Worksheet) so they meet the criteria for an achievement goal.
- * (10 minutes) Using Overhead 4.1-3 (Practice Goals Worksheet), ask participants to report out changes they made and how the changes address the criteria.
- * (20 minutes) Give participants copies of the partially completed Student Achievement Goals Worksheet (from Template 4.1-1), explaining that they will now use what they have learned to write goals for their own school. Show them the data statements using an overhead of the worksheet and ask participants to work in groups to create a student achievement goal for each of the data statements. Make sure teams have the necessary information for writing goals that meet state or federal accountability requirements.
- * (10 minutes) Use the overhead of the Student Achievement Goals Worksheet to record the goals the groups have developed. With multiple groups working on the same data statement you may end up with redundant or divergent goals. As a whole group, evaluate the proposed goals and try to reach consensus about a set of goals. Remind participants to evaluate the goals based on the criteria.
- * (5 minutes) **Closure:** If there is no consensus on the goals after a short discussion, tell participants that a team will review them and will submit a set of revised goals to the full staff. Remind them that once they begin implementing the plan, they will write interim goals so they can judge if they are making adequate progress toward the annual goal and make midterm adjustments to the plan if necessary. Inform participants that the next step will be to begin research to find effective practices that will help students meet the achievement goals.