Setting Goals

The Question:

"Goal-setting is such an important part of the work we do in schools, yet sometimes it is difficult to know how to begin. Are there tips for getting started?"

The Answer:

Yes. Here are five Tips for Success:

1. Do a status check of your school's environment
2. Consi7r75(u16.TD[(2.)-475(Consi7r75riG5(Con.00u50mriG5(Con for getting staff, parents and students in the past? If so, then continue in this way to keep everyone engaged in the process and feeling ownership of whatever goals are set. If not, then you have some groundwork to do. See *Ideas Into Action: Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures: Putting the Promise into Practice.*

2. CONSIDER DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOALS

Locker and Latham, in *Ideas into Action* (2006), identify three types of goals:

- **Superordinate goals**
  These goals arise from vision-building and direction-setting activities, which are key leadership practices of effective principals. You and your staff determine what you stand for and will strive for in broad terms.
- **Performance goals**
  These goals take you from your high-level vision to concrete action to achieve the vision. As a principal, you will set performance goals as part of the Principal Appraisal Process. These goals are aligned with the goals set in your School Improvement Plan, which you develop collaboratively with your staff. In both cases, you identify strategies to achieve the goals and indicators of success.

"The performance goals tell us 'what, why it matters, and 'by when' while a learning goal may arise from asking 'how' and 'what is required.'"

Ideas Into Action: Setting Goals: The Power of Purpose

3. USE DATA TO IDENTIFY GAPS

Data collection and analysis are key to setting goals and identifying gaps in performance that help to refine goals and set new ones. Principal Congress 2011 participants identify a wide range of data that they consider when planning for school improvement:

- Diagnostic data (e.g. DRA and CASI)

- Student achievement data (e.g. EQAO, credit accumulation, teacher assessments)

- Perceptual data (e.g. surveys and focus groups for parents, students, teachers)

- Demographic data (e.g. Statistics Canada, census data)

Analyzing your data helps to identify gaps between your vision and the reality.

> " …goal setting becomes a process that naturally creates discrepancies…[it] creates discontent with our current circumstances or performances and generates a discrepancy between the existing situation and a desired future state."
>
> Ideas into Action: Setting Goals: The Power of Purpose

And the more hands that get "down and dirty" with the data, the better. Don't rely on one or two data wizards to compile and interpret reports; excluding others gives the impression that only "smart" people are capable of working with data. Staff need to learn how the data can actually make their jobs easier. (Lovely, 2006)

Watch for the next issue of *Ideas Into Action on using data* in spring of 2011.

4. PRIORITIZE THE AREAS OF FOCUS

Once you have reviewed the data and determined a number of gaps in achieving the vision, you are ready to prioritize the areas of greatest need. While there will be many important things to work on, you have to narrow it down to a reasonable number of key goals to have success. These goals need to be based on the outcomes seen by the whole staff as most critical to achieve.

Lovely (2006) suggests using "selective abandonment" of activities and programs to make room for the essentials. She advises principals to determine which activities, services or programs to retain, refine or relinquish.

Lovely suggests that the screening indicators for sorting activities include asking whether they contribute to increased performance for all students, align with school and district mission and goals, and are worth the amount of resources (time, money, staff) required.

5. USE THE SMART GOALS APPROACH

Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Since 1997, Conzemius and O'Neill (2006) have been teaching this goal-setting model and process, which research tells us are most likely to generate successful results. See the ministry's Setting goals tip sheet included with resources for Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal for more detail on what each of the five measures means.

One of the decisions you make when selecting goals is how challenging to make them. Setting the bar too low leads to lack of engagement by staff in committing to the goal and, ultimately, to lower performance. Yet, if the bar is too high, people may despair of reaching the goal. Collaborative conversations with staff about selecting goals are a good way to work through these decisions.

> "Through a collaborative review process, we plan to have 65% of our students achieve level 3 and above. We feel that this goal is achievable and that the shift in planning will continue to support credit accumulation and will help us focus on practices that support deep learning."
>
> Advance Question Response from 2010 Congress participant

Research shows that more challenging goals can be established as long as they are also clear and specific. This allows everyone to picture the growth path that leads to the goal. In addition, providing supports to increase mastery will lead to successful outcomes; e.g. "role modeling or finding models with which people can identify; communicating in ways that express confidence that the person can attain the goal." (*Ideas Into Action*)

Remember that these five tips are meant to get you started on your quest to set goals effectively. You can learn much more by reading Ideas Into Action: Setting Goals: The Power of Purpose and the original sources listed in the references that follow. Add your own thoughts by joining the Ontario Education Leaders network: http://ontarioeducationleaders.ning.com

REFERENCES

Conzemius, A. & O'Neill, J. (2001). *Building shared responsibility for student learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Lovely, S. (2006). *Setting leadership priorities: What's necessary, what's nice, and what's got to go*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press [Note: this resource was given to Principal Congress 2011 participants in February 2011]