CAPTURING THE LEARNING POINTS

Student Growth Goal Setting in the Classroom

“Part of what we want our teachers to do is to be consciously competent about their instruction. A lot of what teachers do really well, they’re unconsciously competent at it. They do it because it works because we all learn by trial and error. We want our teachers to know exactly what works for them and why.”

—GREG FANCHER, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education, Kennewick School District

One of the core principles established in 2010 by the Washington Teacher/Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP) Steering Committee is that teacher and principal evaluation systems should consider and balance “inputs or acts” with “outputs or results.” Establishing a process for designing student growth goals is an important component of ensuring the results of effective teaching and leading are captured in evaluations. However, a key takeaway from Washington districts that developed processes for student growth goal setting for teachers and principals ahead of schedule is that there is not one right way to do it well. Different districts in Washington have adopted different approaches, all with promising outcomes. This document is intended to help Washington school districts implement student growth goal setting processes by sharing observations, insights, lessons learned, and tools and resources from those who have done this work before them.

“[Student growth goal setting represents] the formalizing of something that teachers do every day. We don’t need to look at it as threatening; we have to look at it like we believe in this. I already want my students to learn.”

—SUSAN JARNOT-BENTHEM, TPEP Coordinator, Bellevue School District

What is the law?

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW 28A.405.100) stipulates that “student growth data must be a substantial factor in evaluating the summative performance of certified classroom teachers for at least three of the evaluation criteria.”

Defining student growth as the change in student achievement between two points in time, the law further states that “student growth data that is relevant to the teacher and subject matter must be a factor in the evaluation process” and “must be based on multiple measures that can include classroom-based, school-based, district-based, and state-based tools. Student growth data elements may include the teacher’s performance as a member of a grade-level, subject-matter, or other instructional team within a school [or the overall instructional team of a school] when the use of this data is relevant and appropriate.”

This document is one in an eight-part series of share tools and best practices for implementing Washington’s new teacher and principal evaluation legislation. These tools and best practices have been drawn from interviews with district leaders and principals who have participated in the Teacher/Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP). The hope is that the lessons learned from their experiences will lead you toward greater success. The ideas in this series of documents are the result of interviews with the leadership of 16 Washington school districts (Anacortes, Bellevue, Bethel, Central Kitsap, Cosmopolis, Issaquah, Kelso, Kennewick, Kettle Falls, Medical Lake, North Mason, Pullman, Seattle, Sumner, Tumwater, Wenatchee) and Educational Service District 101 and Educational Service District 113.
Common Challenges

Reflecting back on the implementation of student growth goal setting, leaders in Washington school districts noted that goal setting was a challenging and a worthwhile process. Several common challenges emerged, including:

- Lack of clarity among teachers on issues such as how much student growth was sufficient and what percentage of students must achieve the established goals.
- Countering misinformation about student growth goal setting.
- Ensuring that the approach used for documenting student growth goals was intuitive and user friendly.
- Embedding Common Core State Standards in the student growth goal setting process.
- Finding the significant amount of time needed to establish meaningful and appropriate student growth goals.

At the same time, there were aspects of the process that were meaningful, such as increased collaboration and a strengthened focus on student learning among teachers.

““There’s a lot of misunderstanding out there. You have to fight through that fear people thinking they are going to lose their jobs and livelihood if they don’t do this correctly. The reality is, it all comes down to relationships. That’s scary for some people because, if you don’t have a good trusting relationship with your administration or teacher, this is a challenging system to try to work through.”

—RICH STALEY, Director of School Improvement, Education Service District 113

Tools From the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

To assist districts, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has developed a number of tools and resources, including a student growth goal setting template and student growth goal setting rubrics for districts’ use or adaptation:

- **Student growth goal setting template.** This template is intended to assist teams of teachers in creating student growth goals for students and selecting performance measures that will help the team monitor students’ progress toward those goals. The goal-setting template includes three steps: (1) establishing a focus for student growth goals; (2) selecting assessments; and (3) establishing learning targets.

- **Student growth goal setting rubric.** This rubric details for teachers and their evaluators the levels of evidence needed to demonstrate achievement of each of five student growth goals on a 4-point scale.

- **Student growth goal setting rubric with critical attributes.** This resource builds critical attributes into the student growth goal setting rubric for certain student growth criteria.

OSPI also will create student growth goal setting exemplars by autumn of 2014.


A Step-by-Step Process From Bethel School District

Bethel School District leaders provide a step-by-step account of their teacher–principal evaluation steering team’s approach to developing and implementing the student growth goal process. Specifically, the following actions assisted in pressing forward this initiative:

**DISTRICT SUPPORTS FOR TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR:**

1. Decided to focus on Criterion 8 (Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning), encouraging teachers in the district to collaborate on a student growth goal for this criterion. This decision was made jointly with the association leadership.

2. Provided teachers and principals with extensive training on the Danielson Instructional Framework and introduced student growth goal setting during summer professional development.

3. Trained teacher leaders in the fall to facilitate grade level and curricular teams in student growth goal setting using “just-in time” online professional development modules and tools created by district.

4. Built understanding of the alignment of Common Core State Standards with the Instructional Framework and the student growth goal process.

5. Determined three essential questions for teachers to address as they set their goals and as they monitored progress throughout the year. These questions guided teachers in determining the learning focus, baseline data, student growth goal targets and assessment measures.

6. Identified multiple, high-quality sources of data to define, monitor, adjust, and evaluate achievement of the student growth goal target(s) throughout the interval of instruction.

7. Created a series of video capturing a team of teachers collaborating around their student growth goal, reflecting and planning lessons with consideration of the data they collected and determining how they will know if students are making progress toward the student growth goal target(s).

8. Convened specialist teachers (art, drama, band, English Language Learner) throughout the district to collaboratively share ideas for the student growth goal process within their disciplines.

9. Uploaded all student growth goal setting resources to the district’s Atomic Learning site for easy, ongoing access.
EXTERNAL SUPPORTS FOR TEACHERS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR:


2. Hired an outside trainer to visit the district on a monthly basis to work with teachers and principals together as they reviewed student assessments.

3. Required teachers and principals to have preobservation and postobservation meetings specifically about student growth.

Training for Student Growth Goal Setting

The state law on student growth goal setting allows for a good deal of local control; districts, therefore, have several complex decisions to make and to communicate with all parties. Many early reforming districts found that teachers had questions about how much growth is enough and what percentage of students need to achieve these goals. Training took several forms, as described firsthand from these Washington educators:

Instructional Coaches in Wenatchee. “We have instructional coaches who are assigned to all of our school districts’ buildings. Coaches were versed on how this all was supposed to work and then collaborated with the building principals in terms of presentation and implementation support. They were available to help teachers who were stuck, who needed additional understanding about how to do it. The instructional coaches in our buildings were a key part of this process.” —John Waldren, Administrator of Special Projects, Wenatchee School District

Wenatchee’s coaches have the following student growth goal setting document at their disposal: http://home.wsd.wednet.edu/sites/default/files/student_growth.pdf

Joint Summer Trainings in Tumwater. “We did August trainings with all the teachers who are on a comprehensive evaluation this past summer. It was key that teachers and principals were together during the trainings. It really took a lot of the anxiety out of the process.” —Jen Brotherton, Supervisor of Curriculum and Instructional Frameworks, Tumwater School District

Professional Learning Communities in Bellevue. “We want our teachers to have ambitious and reasonable goals. We’re in a coaching-rich district, so they were able to work with their peers during the PLC time (professional learning communities), as well as with their building coaches and evaluators in trainings and other sessions. In some cases, I worked with teams of teachers. We want them to work with those they are comfortable with, who know their context, and we’re building capacity as a whole system so you can have this conversation with whoever you need to.” —Susan Jarnot-Benthem, TPEP Coordinator, Bellevue School District

Using Transferable Protocols in Trainings in Kettle Falls. “The administrators should teach staff in a way that is directly transferable to the teachers and kids in the classroom. Administrators should use protocols that the teachers can also use and directly apply in their classrooms. I am pretty excited to be part of a school district that thought this much of teacher training, to do it in this intentional way.” —Thaynan Knowlton, Superintendent, Kettle Falls School District
Quotes From Washington State Leaders in the Field

“Students are at the center of our work. It’s not so much about us, it’s about how we work together as a system to improve student learning. Sometimes that lens gets reversed, and the work of the district becomes solely centered on the relationships with each other. Our professional growth and relationships are in direct service to students and their growth.” —Mary Beth Tack, Director of Teaching and Learning, Kelso School District

“By having a student growth rubric that the teachers create and that the principals follow up on, we get right down to the specific elements around high-quality student work. It starts to embed those principles of complexity, craftsmanship, and authenticity—the hallmarks of high-quality student work, deep down inside of the psyches of the students. Most importantly, we want to emphasize that growth is really who we are and what we care about and what we want to see.” —Thaynan Knowlton, Superintendent, Kettle Falls School District

“Our teachers, for the most part, have reported: (a) ‘This is something that I was already doing; I’m simply capturing in a formalized manner what I’ve always have been doing;’ and (b) ‘This took something that was on the back burner and put it on the front burner; I pay more attention, and I’ve thought it out a little more, and I’ve thought about how I’m going to capture this data.’ So for us, the experience with student growth thus far has been very positive. We have teachers working on social-emotional learning, we have teachers working on academic learning, all kinds of variation. I think it’s really exciting as a system to see that, to see the various things that the teachers are excited about and are important to our students’ education... That’s not to say there aren’t conflicts; we embrace the conflicts, and we work through them. We all want the same thing, we all want our students learning, and, as a result, we—teachers, administrators, and students—all learn.” —Susan Jarnot-Benthem, TPEP Coordinator, Bellevue School District