

the key actions and *outcome* benchmarks that track early evidence of change and/or progress toward the ultimate goal.

Key Actions:

- Reduce my daily calorie intake to fewer than 1,000 calories for each of 10 weeks.
- Walk 15 minutes a day; increase my time by five minutes a week for the next four weeks.
- Starting in Week 5, run and walk in intervals for 30 minutes, increasing the proportion of time spent running instead of walking until I can run one mile, nonstop, by the end of Week 10.

Benchmarks:

- For process, maintain a daily record of calorie intake and exercise.
- For outcome, biweekly weight loss and running distance targets (e.g., after two weeks, 2 pounds/0 miles; after four weeks, 4 pounds/0 miles; after six weeks, 6 pounds/.2 miles; after eight weeks, 8 pounds/.4 miles).

S.M.A.R.T. goal statements with action plans and benchmarks will make a difference in schools.

S = Specific and Strategic

Goals need to be straightforward and clearly written, with sufficient specificity to determine whether they have been achieved. A goal is strategic when it serves an important purpose of the school or district as a whole and when it addresses something that is likely to have a large impact on the overall vision.

M = Measurable

If it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed. What measures of quantity, quality, and/or impact will be used to determine whether the goal has been achieved? How will progress along the way be measured? Progress toward achieving the goal typically is measured through *benchmarks*. Some benchmarks focus on the process, as in are we doing what we said we were going to do? Other benchmarks focus on the outcome, as in are we seeing early signs of progress toward the results?

A = Action Oriented

Goals have active, not passive verbs. The action steps attached to the goals indicate *who* is doing *what*. Without clarity about what is actually going to be done to achieve the goal, a goal is only a hope with little chance of being achieved. Making clear the key actions required to achieve a goal helps everyone see how their part of the work is connected to other parts of the work and to a larger purpose. This knowledge helps people stay focused and energized rather than become fragmented and uncertain.

R = Rigorous, Realistic, and Results Focused (the 3 Rs)

A goal is not an activity—a goal makes clear what will be different as a result of achieving the goal. A goal needs to describe a realistic yet ambitious result. It needs to stretch the educator, team, school, or district toward improvement, but it should not be out of reach. The focus and effort required to achieve a rigorous but realistic goal should be challenging but not exhausting. Goals set too high are discouraging, while goals set too low will leave a feeling of emptiness when they are accomplished and will not serve students well.

T = Timed and Tracked

A goal needs to have a deadline. Deadlines help everyone take action. For a goal to be accomplished, there should be definite times when key actions will be completed and benchmarks will be achieved. Tracking the progress made on action steps (process benchmarks) is essential— falling behind on doing one action will result in needing to accelerate the pace on another. Tracking progress on process outcomes is not enough, however. Outcome benchmarks help educators know whether they are on track to achieve the goal and/or whether they have reached the goal. Benchmarks give educators a way to see progress and celebrate it. They also give educators information they need to make midcourse corrections.

