District Management Group

MANAGER'S TOOLKIT

How Smart Are These SMART Goals?

Originally published in *District Management Journal*, v.24, Fall 2018

> *While the SMART goal has become a familiar concept and seems straightforward to create, crafting a SMART goal that truly embodies all the necessary components is actually very challenging.*

How Smart Are These SMART Goals?

A well-structured SMART goal is central to the Breakthrough Results Approach. It provides the vehicle through which leadership skills are practiced and learned while driving meaningful results for the district. While the SMART goal has become a familiar concept and seems straightforward to create, crafting a SMART goal that truly embodies all the necessary components (Specific, Measurable, Aggressive but Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) is actually very challenging.

Take the following quiz to see if you can identify the strongest SMART goals. Below are eight SMART goals of varying strength. Decide which are strong, "getting there," or weak, and articulate your rationale. **Then, be sure to check your work with the answer key that follows.**

SMART Goal	Rating	Rationale
1. Between October 1 and December 8, 2018, increase the number of students reading at grade level (as measured in the DIBELS assessment) by 10%, from 23% to 33%, in all K-2 classrooms.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
2. Reduce district dropouts by 1,000 students within three years.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
3. By July 2018, reduce the number of long-term suspensions by 20%, from 100 to 80, and the number of days absent from school from 150 to 120.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
4. By July 2018, increase the number of parent workshops from three every semester to six every semester.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	

SMART Goal	Rating	Rationale
5. Between October and December, our targeted ELL students will improve by 8% on average from the baseline of 25% established by an in-house pretest on creating equations that describe numbers or relationships, as compared to a baseline of 2% growth during the same period.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
6. In a 10-week period, 80% of 50 targeted ELL students will increase class grades to at least a C average as measured by weekly reports, IAB scores, performance tasks, student portfolios, and 10-to-15-week progress reports.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
7. Between March 5 and May 18, 2018, 25 out of 35 (70%) targeted students will increase their scores on math word problems by one point on an SBAC-aligned four-point rubric as compared to an average of 0 points during the same period before.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	
8. In a 10-week period, 80% of the 50 11th-grade students enrolled in Financial Algebra and Algebra 2 will demonstrate mastery of at least 3 on learning target 2 as measured by the Springboard unit assessment as opposed to 60% of students in a 10-week period prior to the challenge.	☐ Strong Goal ☐ Getting There ☐ Weak Goal	

District Management Group

Manager's Toolkit

How Smart Are These SMART Goals?

Answer Key:

1. Strong: This goal embodies all of the characteristics of a SMART goal. It is specific—it shares the exact assessment to be used. It is measurable—clear percentages are given. It is also aggressive but achievable.* It is relevant because every child should be growing in reading levels. Finally, it is time-bound.

2. Getting there: This goal could be more specific for a district-level goal. Should the district prioritize decreasing dropouts in specific schools? Or is the issue district-wide, and is the goal fine as written? We do think this goal is relevant—students need to be in school in order to learn. Finally, while the goal has a time property to it, we think the time frame can be more specific—what are the exact dates being used for this goal?

3. Getting there: This goal embodies all the characteristics of a SMART goal. We would adjust two things to make it stronger: get even clearer on the timing—what are the beginning and end dates? Also, identify the exact target population of students.

4. Weak: This goal is weak for a few reasons. SMART goals must be results-driven and not activities-driven. Increasing parent workshops may be a very worthwhile endeavor, but to what end? Does the team who wrote this goal want to increase attendance? Do they want to increase PTA membership to raise funds for something? The overarching purpose of this activity needs to be clear. Additionally, this goal can be clearer on timing.

5. Getting there: Timing could be clearer. Also, this goal is written in an overly complex way. We might suggest adjusting it to: "Between October 8 and December 18, 20 of 25 targeted ELL students will improve by 8%, from 25% to 33%, on creating equations that describe numbers or relationships as measured by the baseline assessment."

6. Weak: The time frame could be clearer. Additionally, grades are a challenging thing to measure: their inputs likely vary from classroom to classroom, especially if schools and teachers don't have a common planning structure in place. Different assignments could be given in different classrooms, increasing variability and decreasing the confidence as to which strategies work toward meeting the goal. Finally, it does not reference a baseline—what are these data being compared to and what makes this goal more aggressive (yet still achievable) than what students did in a similar time frame before this goal was drafted?

7. Getting there: This goal embodies most components of the SMART goal framework. One question is whether "math word problems" is specific enough. In the age of Common Core, we're confident that many, if not all, math standards include word problems, so we'd ask for this goal to be made even more specific by identifying the exact standard/strand of work within grade levels.

8. Strong: This is strong, but to create even greater clarity, it would be better to express "80% of 50 students" as "40 of 50 students." This rewording makes data conversations even clearer by putting the focus on actual students.

*A note on "aggressive but achievable": We call this the "sweet spot" of a goal that must take into account so many contextual factors. For example, a school might say they want to increase the scores of 20 ELL students from 60% to 80% on solving algebraic equations as measured by the baseline assessment for eighth grade, but how can we know if that goal is not only aggressive but achievable? Below are some guiding questions to help determine the answer:

- What does historical data look like for this skill? How long does it take a student to become proficient with this skill? What have we seen in the past?
- What is the current performance of this subgroup of students on related skills?
- Is 20 the right number of students? What percentage is 20 of the total student population? Of all ELL students on campus?

There is no standard barometer for determining whether a goal is aggressive but achievable; however, context matters!