



Common Principles of Effective Practice (CPEP) and Implementation: A Framework for Integrating Initiatives and Sustaining Evidence-based Practices

Defined and Measurable Goals & Outcomes

What is meant by measurable goals and outcomes?

Setting measurable goals and outcomes as part of implementing instruction or programming is best practice in education. Having measurable goals and outcomes has been identified as one of the eight *common principles of effective practice* that the Minnesota Department of Education recognizes as an integral component of a systemic framework needed to support and sustain educational innovations. Graduation with a high school diploma, college readiness, employment, financial independence, civic involvement and healthy habits are all examples of positive distal outcomes commonly desired for students as they progress through their education. Helping students achieve such outcomes is facilitated by the determination of specific, well-defined goals through each student's educational career, from prekindergarten through high school graduation and beyond.

Why is it important to have measurable goals and outcomes?

Setting goals and identifying desired outcomes is simply good planning. To arrive at a long-term positive outcome, it is necessary to create a thorough, strategic plan to focus instructional efforts and evaluate progress. Setting realistic yet ambitious educational goals for individual students, and at systemic levels of the classroom, school, district and state, provides a target that ensures a level of academic competence is reached. Goal setting in education can be used at a student, programmatic or systemic level. For example, goals can be set to:

- Identify the extent to which the desired increase in student achievement is met.
- Measure the implementation and effectiveness of evidence-based practices.
- Focus school and district improvement activities including educational improvement plans and staff development plans.

What are key elements of well-defined goals?

- *A well-defined goal is specific.* It should clearly identify desired performance in specific skills and abilities over a set duration of time.
- *A well-defined goal is measurable.* If definitions provide sufficient detail and specificity, then targeted skills can be directly and regularly observed or assessed and progress can be quantified.
- *A well-defined goal is defined in context.* It should take current levels of performance and historical performance into account. Goals can be realistic, yet ambitious, when they are developed in light of past and present functioning.

How do we know we are using measurable goals and outcomes appropriately?

Goals should be formulated in consideration of previous, current and future goals. In this way, goal setting can be aligned with a particular long-term outcome. For instance, goals concerning students' early numeracy should be determined within the context of goals that are expected to be achieved over time ranging from kindergarten to third grade, to middle school, to high school, pre-college, etc. Individual educational goals are proximal when attainment of one leads directly into progress toward another; for instance, when a student masters the multiplication of single digits, he or she is ready to begin mastering the same feat with double-digit numbers.

The Minnesota Department of Education advocates setting goals that have five key characteristics: specific and strategic, measurable, attainable, results-based and time bound – or SMART.

What is a SMART goal?

S: Specific and Strategic

- Identifies sufficient detail to know exactly who and what regarding student achievement
- States goal as a positive statement linked to student achievement
- Reflects a long-term goal
- Reflects student achievement trends
- Aligns with other initiatives

M: Measurable

- Identifies the starting value from the previous year's data
- Identifies the final value to be achieved

A: Attainable

- Sets a final value that is reachable within the time frame
- Stretches the previous achievement level with a reasonable increase given the starting point

R: Results-based

- Identifies assessment (may need to be standardized)
- Includes all students assessed in the group
- Uses an appropriate measure for the assessment

T: Time-bound

- Identifies the time when goal attainment will be measured

Examples of goals at the school and district level

- The percentage of all students in grades 3-5 at XYZ Academy who earn achievement levels of Meets the Standards or Exceeds the Standards on the Mathematics MCA-II will increase from 80.1 percent in 2007 to 83 percent in 2008.
- The percentage of all students in grade 10 in XYZ District who are on track to be college-ready for mathematics as measured by ACT's PLAN test will increase from 15.2 percent in 2007 to 30 percent in 2008.

What are the benefits of using measurable goals and outcomes?

By setting goals as part of best practice and using the SMART goal format (specific and strategic, measurable, attainable, results-based and time bound), several benefits will occur. For example,

- Clarity about what is to be attained will be overtly described and progress will be more easily measured allowing more objective determination of whether the goal was met.
- Use of goal setting as an overt transparent process promotes ownership and buy-in.
- Setting goals that are results based and time bound drive collective action including program and instructional planning to achieve the desired results.

References

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