Secondary Case Study for Annual Goals and Student Investment

As an 8th grade Math teacher, Mr. R teaches a diverse group of students at a Title 1 Campus in Houston Independent School District. The school is 85% Hispanic, 8% African- American, 4% Asian, and 3% white. 90% of the school population is on free or reduced price lunch. He teaches a combination of pre-AP, special education, and ELL students. The following is a description of how he sets goals for his students and invests them in their academic achievement.

Mr. R's Goal Setting Planning Process

At the beginning of the year, Mr. R was assigned a (required) Value-Added measure based on the STAAR end-of-year assessment and a (required) Comparative Growth measure based on Stanford. Considering his Student Performance measures, he looked up his students' raw scores from the previous year's STAAR test [1] on Chancery and entered it into an Excel spreadsheet. He consulted his Math department team and historical data from his campus to help formulate his concept of ambitious yet feasible goals for his students. Looking at his own EVAAS data and talking to other teachers in the department, he noticed a trend that teachers who increased raw scores about 20% from 7th grade standardized tests to 8th grade standardized tests were considered highly effective in terms of EVAAS data. [2]

D2		f_x =B2+C2	
A	B	C	D
Student Name	Last Year Score	20% Growth	Target
Student 1	32	6	38
Student 2	28	6	34
Student 3	35	7	42
Student 4	42	8	50
Student 5	21	4	25

Once he decided that he would use 20% growth as his goal, he formulated student targets. Using Excel functions, he found 20% growth from last year's score for each student and then added that to find individualized target scores for this year's STAAR test, representing the annual goals for each of his students. With the targets in mind, he adjusted any goals that simply did not make sense. For instance, with only 56 questions on the 8th grade STAAR test, any targets that met or exceeded 56 would have to be adjusted. He also consulted the Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) for his special education students to see if there were any adjustments needed for those students.
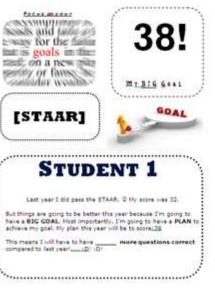
Mr. R wrote the goal:

Each student will grow 20% from their raw score on the 7th grade STAAR test, as measured by their score on the 8th grade STAAR test.

Mr. R's Presentation to Students

Once the target scores were set, Mr. R brainstormed how to present the goals to students. He had built a good rapport in the first weeks of school, so now he needed to design an introduction to goal setting and the individual goals. Being a bit of a techie, he used the mail merge feature in Microsoft Word to import the information from Excel into a letter that was personalized to each child.
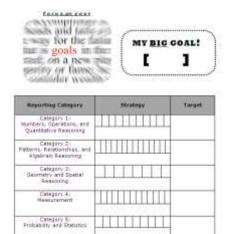

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[1] Refer to the Elementary Case Study to see how a teacher used lexile levels and an adaptation for early childhood education teachers.

[2] Teachers can consult personal EVAAS data to help reflect on what would be ambitious and feasible.

He folded the letter and placed it in an envelope with the student's name on the outside. That Friday he had shortened classes of only 25 minutes, so he decided to use that opportunity to introduce the individualized goals to his students. As the class was coming in, he handed each student their envelope but told them that they could not open it quite yet, letting the suspense build.

He spent the first 20 minutes of class explaining why goal setting is important. He explained the research of Carol Dweck that advocated a growth mindset over a fixed mindset (Dweck, 2010), in which students believe that intelligence and talents can be developed through dedication and hard work, rather than thinking of these traits as already set. At the end of the discussion, with the students empowered by the idea that everyone can grow, they were finally allowed to open their envelope in the last 5 minutes of class. Before they were dismissed, he had them glue their big goal letter into the inside cover of their interactive notebooks so that they would have a reminder of their own personal goal for that year.

When the students returned to class on Monday, he gave each student a Big Goal Strategy sheet to also keep in their interactive notebooks. First, they put their big goal at the top right corner to remind them of the number they had been given the previous week. He then explained that the STAAR test is separated into five reporting categories, and there are different knowledge and skills that they students need to master for each category. He told them that he had chosen their big goal, but they were able to choose how they got to that big goal. They had to come up with a strategy of which reporting categories they were going to focus on so that the target number for all the reporting categories combined would equal their big goal number. They would show their strategy by highlighting the boxes in the Strategy column for how many questions they were planning to get right in each category.

Next Steps

As the year progresses, Mr. R plans to add "Big Goal Questions" to his end of unit tests that match the rigor and categories of the STAAR assessment. If students answer those questions correctly, they can check off a box in their strategy column to see if they are on track to reaching their growth goal. Mr. R also plans to check in with students about their goals at the end of each 6 week grading period. He intends to praise students that reach the correct proportion of their goal for that point in the year, but also design a system for students to earn back any Big Goal Questions they do not get credit for by coming to after school or Saturday tutorials.

Adaptations

For performance based or non-Value Added classes, all teachers are required to categorize their students at the beginning of the year to find starting points for their Student Progress Measure. This may be based on either grades from a prior class that are relevant to the current class or based on a beginning of year assessment/performance task. They also have to set goals for their students based on those initial categories. To invest students in their goals, teachers should make students aware of the end of year expectations. Then, at the end of each unit, grading cycle, or semester, give the students an assessment/performance task that is similar to that by which they will be measured at the end of the year. Allow students to reflect on potential areas of growth and areas of strength so that they are progressing toward their end of year target.