

Peers interview partner about goals:

Step 1: At the start of the school year, it's important to set goals. Ask, "What are some things you want to have happen over the course of this year at school?"

Step 2: It's also important to set goals for ourselves, to become better as individuals. This is known as improving our character. We all have the ability to act in what can be referred to as virtuous ways. Acting in these ways most of the time is good for us and good for those around us.

Here is a list of **12 virtues** (you can choose to discuss each one, students may add to the list): caring, confidence, kindness, courage, perseverance, courtesy, respect, enthusiasm, responsibility, patience, generosity, and truthfulness.

Step 3: Now, as an in-class activity, students will discuss with their partner(s) the above 12 virtues and each set a goal regarding a virtue that is most important to them. Please follow the below set of interview or conversation questions.

1. Who is someone you admire, either in your life or in history, and what is the core virtue that you think they have followed?
2. Find one of your own virtues on the list and share a few words about how you try to live this virtue.
3. What is a virtue that you would like to work on to improve your life?
4. What are some ways that you can show this virtue?
5. How can I help you to do this successfully?

Once one student has answered all of these questions, the students reverse roles in the interview.

We will revisit these goals at the end of each marking period.

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A Framework for Student Goal-Setting

When middle and high school students set short- and long-term goals, they can see a path to the success they hope for.

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“If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves.”

—Thomas Edison

I learned that quote from Wendy Beth Rosen’s *Self-Smart*. Taking it seriously, Wendy suggests some areas where students’—and adults’—self-assessments can lead to greater accomplishments and personal satisfaction. Many distractions and challenges in our lives threaten to throw us off our path, or keep us from knowing what our path is. Setting explicit goals for success and tracking our progress toward them is a way to increase our chances of finding the success we hope for.

I’d like to share a method of goal-tracking that can be used by students and educators in ongoing ways, as well as at specific points when they’re experiencing uncertainty or setbacks. These also have value for promoting positive mental health in school.

SETTING AND TRACKING GOALS

Middle and high school are particularly important times for students to become consciously aware of and intentional about key choices: what they're putting into their bodies; how the way they are spending their time helps them reach their larger purposes; who they're spending their time with; and what they're doing to contribute to their families, schools, and communities.

At the beginning of the school year and at each marking period, students in middle and high school should record in a journal their goals in these eight areas:

1. Academics
2. Social life
3. Sports and exercise
4. Healthy eating
5. Family and community
6. Hobbies and interests
7. Screen time
8. Long-term plans

In working with middle school students, for example, I have seen them set goals ranging from “eating better food at lunch” to “being a great guitar player” to “being an NBA star.” In all cases, we want to help students be clear about their goals (in the first case, “to be a healthy person”) and to set realistic short-term goals on the way to their long-term goal (for the guitar and basketball players, finding time for regular practice with feedback). For these students, and all students, goals provide anchors, especially valuable in high winds and rough seas.

All of the eight areas of life above matter, and academic success is related to all of them. Having a way to separate them, document progress, and create priorities is important. Students need help to be successful even when they have positive aspirations. A sure way to not succeed is trying to make progress in too many areas at once, so help students find one, two, or three areas to prioritize for a marking period. Revisit these priorities with them and see if follow-up goals need to be set in these areas or if new areas should be prioritized. Keeping to no more than three at a time is vital, because even if we might need to change in eight areas, we can't track that many. Slow and steady wins the race.

Tracking also helps ensure that a given area is not neglected. When we see that things might have been neglected, we can make some adjustments.

The main point of setting goals is to help students take realistic steps to achieve them. Many educators use the SMART format

Developing a SMART Goal

SMART stands for specific; measurable; attainable; relevant (and rigorous, realistic, and results-focused); and timely (and trackable).

—goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely—is practical and reasonable, and keeps students on track.

Now, complete your individual goal-setting worksheet.