ONTARIO LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

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Ideas Into Action is published by the Ministry of Education to support Ontario's school and district leaders. It is designed to provide research insights and practical strategies that are aligned with both the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) 2012 and the broader Ontario Leadership Strategy (OLS). Ministry-sponsored professional learning and resources are focused on five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) derived from the OLF: setting goals, aligning resources with priorities, promoting collaborative learning cultures, using data, and engaging in courageous conversations.

Ideas Into Action is currently devoted to exploring these five CLCs as one of many supports being provided to assist leaders in further strengthening and integrating these capacities into their daily practice. Each bulletin has as its primary focus one of the CLCs and shows how it is derived from the Ontario Leadership Framework, which describes the full range of leadership practices and personal leadership resources leaders use to meet their specific challenges and leadership goals.

Learn more about the Ontario Leadership Strategy at www.ontario.ca/eduleadership
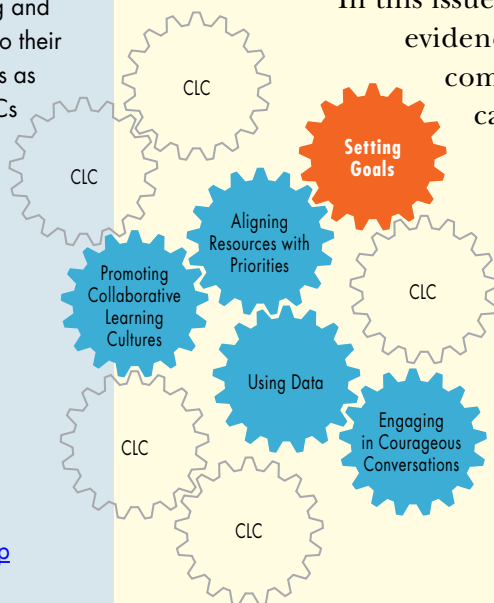
Exploring Five Core Leadership Capacities

Setting Goals: The Power of Purpose

Few would argue with the notion that having a clear set of goals – whether for ourselves or for our organization – is an important foundation of success. Goals help us focus our energy and actions, measure our progress and, ultimately, achieve purposeful results. But most of us would also acknowledge that there is a considerable gap between mere familiarity with goal setting and true mastery – the ability to develop and communicate powerful goals that galvanize us and our organization, produce sustained action, and generate transformational results.

In this issue of *Ideas Into Action* we explore the research evidence for the CLC "setting goals" as a critical component of educational leadership that can have a significant impact on student achievement, both directly and indirectly. We look at how – and why – goals influence attitudes and behaviour, and the ways both school and district leaders can put this knowledge to use in moving their organizations toward positive change, growth and improvement.

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The Case for Setting Goals: Research Perspectives

Are there clear links between setting goals, motivation and performance? Edwin Locke and Gary Latham, two of the most influential thinkers in the field of goal-setting theory and practice, brought attention to this question, beginning in the late 1960s (Locke and Latham, 2002). Locke's pioneering work established the relationship between clear goals, appropriate feedback, and employee motivation. Latham, currently a professor at the Rotman School of Management, studied the effects of goal setting in the workplace, and established what is now considered an inseparable link between goal setting and workplace performance.

Since then much light has been shed on goal setting in the specific context of educational leadership. In a recently published synthesis of research on how educational leadership influences student outcomes, Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) identified "establishing goals and expectations" as first among eight key dimensions. They define goal setting in the education context as "the setting, communicating and monitoring of learning goals, standards, and expectations and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals."

Leithwood and Reihl (2003) also recognize "building vision and setting directions" as one of the core practices of successful leadership. Two functions, they assert, lie at the heart of leadership – providing direction and exercising influence. In other words, leaders mobilize and work with others to achieve shared goals. The implications, they suggest, are the following:

- Leaders do not merely impose goals on followers, but work with others to create a shared sense of purpose and direction.
- Leaders primarily work through and with other people. They also help to establish the conditions that enable others to be effective. Thus, leadership effects on school goals are indirect as well as direct.
- Leadership is a function more than a role. Although leadership is often invested in – or expected of – persons in positions of formal authority, leadership encompasses a set of functions that may be performed by many different persons in different roles throughout a school.
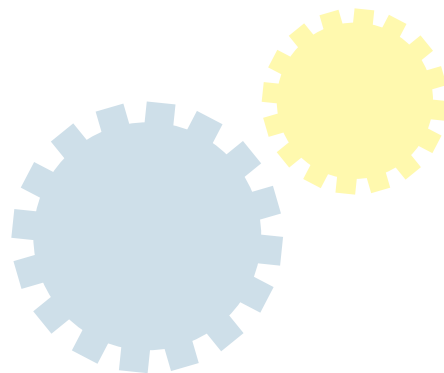
A study undertaken by Leithwood and Sun (2009) likewise demonstrates that, by developing a shared vision, building consensus on goals and holding high performance expectations, leaders have a significant positive impact on:

- Essential school conditions such as school culture and shared decision-making processes
- Key teacher-related outcomes such as teacher satisfaction, commitment, empowerment, efficacy, and "organizational citizenship."

These critical school conditions and teacher-related outcomes, in turn, make direct contributions to student learning, according to Leithwood and Jantzi (2005). In fact, a review by Leithwood (2006) of "school working conditions that matter" suggests that school culture has significant effects on seven of the eight teacher "inner states" most directly related to student achievement, including satisfaction, commitment and stress/burnout. Many other educational studies have supported these results.

Focusing the school on goals and expectations for student achievement, for example, is one of the three leadership practices that contribute to better instruction that were identified in a large scale study of education leadership commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson, 2010). What is noteworthy is that this study also points out that, while the principal plays the central role in school leadership, high-performing schools benefit from the leadership of many – with the principal encouraging teachers, parents and others to participate in making decisions. Achieving such cohesive and collaborative success, however, points back to the importance of the school leader's ability to develop clear goals, and motivate all of the involved stakeholders to work together toward a shared vision.

Getting Under the Hood:
How and Why Goals Work

If the case for setting goals is clear, the question remains: why do goals work as they do?

At its most basic, to borrow from Locke and Latham (2002), a goal is "the object or aim of an action…a goal reflects one's purpose and refers to quantity, quality or rate of performance."

Using this definition, goal setting becomes a process that naturally creates discrepancies. This is because goal setting creates discontent with our current circumstances or performance and generates a discrepancy between the existing situation and a desired future state.

But it does more than that. As Bandura (1997) suggests, goal setting affects our level of motivation, our beliefs about what we are capable of learning or the level at which we are capable of performing, and our own self-evaluation.

Why? Because the discrepancy created by goal setting is experienced as a "constructive discontent" (Robinson et al, 2009) that motivates persistent, goal-relevant behaviour. Goals focus our attention, and lead to a more determined and sustained effort than would otherwise be the case.

Is this always the case? No. According to Robinson et al (2009) goals are only motivating in an education setting if three conditions are met:

1. Teachers, students, or parents feel they have the capacity to meet the goals. Either they believe their current resources are sufficient for the purpose or they are confident they will be given the additional expertise and support they need.
2. People are committed to the goals. This requires first of all that they understand and value them.
3. The goals are specific and unambiguous. Specificity makes it possible to assess progress and adjust one's practice accordingly.

Latham and Locke (2006) also point to the importance of distinguishing between assigned goals and personal goals. Personal goals, along with an individual's sense of self-efficacy, are what most directly determine a person's actions. However, assigning a challenging goal – in itself – can actually raise a person's sense of
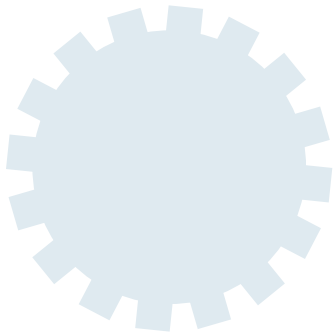
self-efficacy and affect an individual's personal goals since it is an indication of confidence on the part of the leader. Challenging goals, they suggest, raise an individual's personal effectiveness.

The concept of efficacy is essential to this process. Efficacy is a belief someone holds about his or her own ability – personal efficacy – or a belief in the ability of his or her colleagues – collective efficacy – to perform a task or achieve a goal (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs are critical to people's ability to get things done. These beliefs affect the choices we make about which activities to engage in and, likewise, our coping abilities once we have begun to take action. In practice, as Louis et al (2010) point out, efficacy is a measure of how much effort people will expend, and how long they will persist in the face of failure or difficulty.

Going with the Flow: Goal-Directed Behaviour and Happiness

One of the key premises of goal-setting theory is that goal-directed action is an essential part of human life. Without goal-directed action, people can't attain survival, much less happiness. One particularly fascinating perspective on goal-directed action – and our own personal engagement with life – was pioneered by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who studied, and came to define a state known as "flow."

We can all remember a time in which we were so engaged in an activity – delivering a particularly creative lesson, working one-on-one with a struggling student, or solving a difficult problem – that we became disengaged from the background "noise" of everyday life. In Csikszentmihalyi's view, our emotional state plays a major role in the degree to which we can experience this state of engagement.

Negative emotions, he says, like sadness, fear, anxiety, or boredom produce what he calls "psychic entropy" in the mind – a state in which we cannot use attention effectively to deal with external tasks because we need that attention to restore our inner order. Positive emotions like happiness, strength or alertness, he suggests, are states of "psychic negentropy" in which we don't need the attention required to ruminate and feel sorry for ourselves, and so can direct our attention fully and freely into whatever task we are engaged in.

"Flow" as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1997) is "deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically interesting. Individuals in a state of flow see the activity as worthwhile even if no further goal is reached. Flow is believed to occur at the point of balance between the challenge inherent in the task at hand and the skills required to accomplish it." Writers continue to draw on the theory of flow to offer applications across sectors for fostering and sustaining engagement in learning. For example, "instructional challenge," the fifth measure of student engagement used in *What Did You Do In School Today?* (Willms et al, 2009), is based on Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) theory of flow.

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Csikszentmihalyi observes that goals are usually arranged in a hierarchy, from trivial ones, like getting to the corner store to buy some ice cream, to major ones like risking one's life for the country. In the course of the average day, about one-third of the time people will say that they do what they do because they wanted to do it, one-third because they had to do it and the last third because they had nothing better to do. These proportions vary by age, gender, and activity, he says.

What is particularly interesting here is that quite a bit of evidence shows that whereas people feel best when what they do is voluntary, they do not feel worse when what they do is obligatory. Psychic entropy – disengagement – is highest, instead, when people feel that what they do is motivated by not having anything else to do. In this way, both internal motivation – "I want to do it" – and external motivation – "I have to do it" – are preferred over the state in which there are no goals whatsoever – no means to focus attention.

On the Ground:
Putting Goal Setting to Work

How can we harness the power of goal setting to generate results? The research of Latham and Locke (2002, 2006) provides a powerful set of tools we can use when developing goals, to ensure that we are taking human dynamics into account, and that the goals we set will lead to purposeful and effective behaviour. The following is a summary of their key findings about the process of setting goals and some suggested implications for leadership practice.

Self-efficacy:
• Specific, difficult goals consistently lead to higher performance than simply urging people to "do their best."
• When goals are of equal difficulty, higher expectations lead to higher performance. Even lower expectations, when associated with more difficult goals, lead to higher performance.
• When short-term sub-goals are set, in addition to the long-term goal, self-efficacy rises in comparison with the situation in which only the long-term goal is present.

Robinson et al (2009) believe that the content of goals may be as important as the process of setting goals and argue that "good" goals in an education environment are:

- **Academic** In high-achieving schools and schools that are making major achievement gains, a focus on academic goals is both a property of leadership (the principal makes student achievement the school's top goal) and a quality of school organization (school-wide objectives are the focal point of instruction).
- **Specific:** The more strongly principals espouse abstract vision statements, the more negatively their teachers will react. Effective goals are clear and specific, and make it possible to assess progress and adjust accordingly.
- **Challenging but achievable:** Effective goals are set at an appropriate level of difficulty. The perceived difficulty of a goal and the perceived capacity to meet it are inseparably linked, so what counts as difficult will change as capacity changes.

... and some implications for leadership practice:

- Ensure that goals are challenging and clear and include a target and a timeframe.
- Provide supports to increase mastery that leads to successful outcomes; e.g. role modeling or finding models with which people can identify; communicating in ways that express confidence that the person can attain the goal.
- Make certain that self-confidence is commensurate with the level of difficulty of the goal.

Task complexity:

- When tasks are complex, short-term goals that provide immediate incentives and guidelines for performance may produce better performance than long-term goals that are too far removed in time to mobilize efforts.
- As the complexity of the task increases and requires the development of higher level skills, the effect of the goal on performance will depend on the ability of the individual to discover appropriate task strategies.

... and some implications for leadership practice:

Know why goal setting is important and how goal setting works.

- Check rather than assume capacity to set appropriate goals and, where needed, provide opportunities to learn how to link data to next steps.
- Work collaboratively to set short-term goals to improve performance on complex tasks.
- Be knowledgeable about subject-specific assessment, curriculum expectations and instructional strategies in order to help set appropriate improvement goals based on data.

Goal commitment:

- The relationship between goals and performance is strongest when people are committed to their goals.
- The commitment is most relevant when goals are difficult, since these goals require more effort and may have a lower chance of success than simple goals.
- Two categories of factors required in particular for goal commitment are:
  1. Making goal attainment important to people, including the importance of the expected outcomes.
  2. Influencing people's belief that they can attain the goal.
- Goals assigned to us will motivate us as much as those we choose ourselves, as long as the purpose or rationale for the goal is provided.

... and some implications for leadership practice:

- Make public the commitment to the goal, and establish the importance of the goal by linking it to the big picture, such as pedagogical, philosophical, and moral purposes, and by modelling.
- Demonstrate priorities through personal actions; e.g. attendance and participation in professional learning and meetings associated with an initiative signal commitment to its goals and a determination to support successful implementation.
- Ensure that all stakeholders participate in setting goals to help them see the importance of the goal for themselves and to gain shared ownership.

Feedback:

- The combination of goal setting and providing feedback has been shown to be more effective than goal setting on its own.

... and some implications for leadership practice:

- Give timely feedback which provides information about whether the person's picture of reality is aligned with what is required to attain the goal.
- Provide ongoing and summary feedback that indicates attention is being paid to the progress being made towards the goals.

Satisfaction:

- Satisfaction increases when people exceed their goals.
- Failing to reach a goal creates decreasing satisfaction as the size of the discrepancy grows.
- A person's total satisfaction grows with the number of successes.
- Setting challenging goals increases the interest in a task and helps people discover the pleasurable aspects of the activity involved.

... and some implications for leadership practice:

- Consult and collaborate to identify strategies and involve others such as supervisors, peers, mentors, coaches and others in collaboration.
- Provide implementation support.

High performance cycles:
- The higher the goal, the higher the performance.
- High performance leads to rewards such as recognition.
- Rewards lead to satisfaction, and a high sense of self-efficacy in regard to meeting future challenges through even higher goals.
- Satisfaction is not the cause but the result of high performance.

... and some implications for leadership practice:
- Provide supports that build capacity for setting goals and for self-regulation.
- Ensure that recognition and rewards are in place to sustain the momentum of high performance cycles.

Goal conflict:
- When the specific, difficult goals of individuals are aligned with the goals of the overall group, the performance of the group improves.
- When people are allowed to participate in setting goals they actually set higher goals, and have higher performance, than those who are simply assigned goals.

... and some implications for leadership practice:
- Engage in collaborative goal setting.
- Set a superordinate goal that sets a shared vision for people to rally around.
- Align goals across different organizational levels to achieve a shared vision among organizational members.

Learning and performance goals:
- When tasks are complex, learning goals may be more effective than performance goals (see page xx for more about learning and performance goals).
- When people lack the knowledge and skills to attain a performance goal, giving them a difficult goal sometimes leads to poorer performance.

... and some implications for leadership practice:
- Treat goal setting as a process of professional learning and ongoing development.

What are some of the common pitfalls to avoid in setting goals?

The research of Latham and Locke (2006) points to a number of common pitfalls leaders may encounter. They are summarized in the following:

CONTENT OF THE GOAL

- **Goals that are too difficult:** When people lack the knowledge and skills to attain a performance goal, giving them a difficult goal sometimes leads to poorer performance. Of course, goals can and should "stretch" us.
- **Establishing an idealized goal:** An idealized goal that a leader, group or organization ties to personal identity – one that ties goal attainment to self-esteem – can lead to inappropriate actions aimed at attaining the goal regardless of possible costs and consequences. The outcome can be an unrealistic over-commitment or reluctance to abandon the goal regardless of the facts or circumstances, and a temptation to act irrationally when goal attainment is threatened.
- **Ignoring non-goal performance dimensions:** Goals are designed to direct thought and action. On the other hand, this means that performance dimensions for which goals are not set will not receive the same degree of attention.

GOAL SETTING PROCESSES

- **Conflict within a group:** A performance goal can have a detrimental effect on a group's performance if there is conflict among group members.
- **Punishment for failure to reach a goal:** Goals may have an adverse effect on risktaking.

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS

- **Negative perceptions:** Goal setting may be perceived as a threat rather than a challenge.
- **Success in goal attainment:** High satisfaction typically leads to increasingly high self-confidence and the setting of even higher goals. People may persist in using older strategies rather than adopting new and more appropriate ones for the new task at hand.
- **Rewards for success in goal attainment:** When a reward is tied to goal attainment people who come close to but fail to attain their goals are more likely to overstate their performance than those who are not so close to attaining their goals.
- **Goal-related stress:** Goals may increase a person's stress especially if there are a large number, rather than a reasonable number of goals.

- **Reaching or exceeding challenging goals:** There is a risk that individuals or groups who reach or exceed challenging goals may be assigned goals in future that are impossible to attain. As performance gets progressively higher, it typically becomes harder to improve.

As you anticipate and resolve goal setting roadblocks and issues, you may also find the following table useful. It was developed by Robinson et al (2009) and based on the work of Locke and Latham (2002).

PROBLEM	STRATEGY
People lack the skills and knowledge to achieve the goal.	Set relevant learning goals rather than performance goals.
Individuals' goals may be in conflict with others' goals.	Set team or superordinate goals.
Failure to achieve goals is seen as a risk.	Encourage and reward learning from mistakes.
Successful goal attainment can reinforce old strategies that are inappropriate in a changing environment.	Invite robust critique and review of goals and strategies for reaching them.
Accountability for goal attainment can lead to biased and inaccurate reporting.	Check validity of a small sample of reports. Model an ethical culture and show no tolerance for deviations.
Important outcomes that are not set as goals may be ignored.	Set more inclusive goals.
Set goals for all critical outcomes.	Inquire into goal interrelationships.
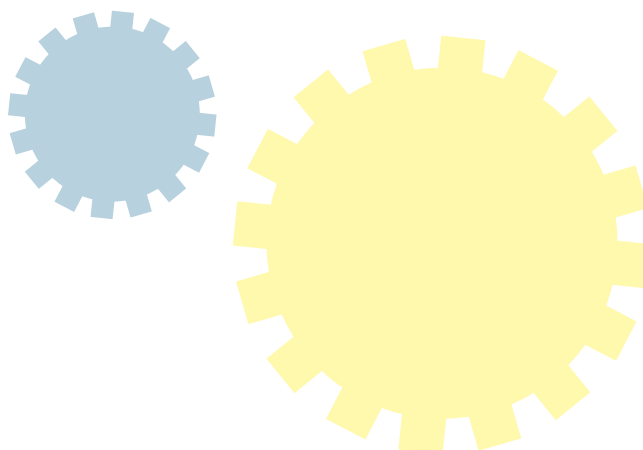
The District Context: Goal Setting for District Leaders

What are the implications of these research findings for system leaders, particularly as they seek to build coherence across ministry, district, schools and classrooms as they focus on the three priority goals; i.e.

1. High levels of student achievement
2. Reduced gaps in student achievement
3. Increased public confidence in publicly funded education?

Marzano and Waters (2009) respond in part to this question through their meta-analysis that determines the strength of relationship between district-level actions and average student achievement. They found the following five district-level leadership behaviours and responsibilities associated with student achievement, all of which are relevant to setting goals:

1. **Ensuring collaborative goal setting:** Effective district leaders include all relevant stakeholders in establishing non-negotiable goals for their districts. In particular, they ensure that principals throughout the district are deeply involved in the goal-setting process since they are the people who will implement articulated district goals in schools. Involving stakeholders in the goal-setting process does not imply that consensus is reached among all involved. It does however imply that once stakeholders reach an appropriate level of agreement about district goals that all stakeholders commit to supporting the attainment of the goals.

2. **Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction:** Effective district leaders help ensure that the collaborative goal setting process results in non-negotiable goals – goals that all staff members must act on – in at least two areas: student achievement and classroom instruction. All staff members in all schools are aware of the goals and an action plan is created for those goals.

3. **Creating board alignment with and support of district goals:** In effective districts, the school board is aligned with and supportive of the non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction. The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives deflect attention or resources from accomplishing them.

4. **Monitoring achievement and instruction goals:** Effective system leaders continually monitor district progress toward achievement and instruction goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind the district's actions. They also ensure that each school regularly examines the extent to which it is meeting achievement targets.

5. **Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction:** High performing districts ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district's goals. This includes the allocation of appropriate funding for professional development for teachers and principals.

Louis et al (2010) also point to a number of core goal-related leadership practices deemed helpful by teachers and principals, as reflected in the following table.

Leadership Practice – Setting Directions	Practices Identified as Instructionally Helpful
Building a shared vision	Focusing the school on goals for student achievement
Fostering acceptance of group goals	Focusing teachers' attention on goals for student achievement
Creating high performance expectations	Focusing teachers' attention on expectations for student achievement
Communicating the direction	Staying current with all aspects of school organization

Furthermore, of the seven important district approaches to improving teaching and learning these researchers identify, three are directly related to goal setting. It is important to note that district policies and practices around instruction are sufficiently powerful that they can be felt indirectly by teachers as stronger and more directed leadership behaviours of principals. Higher-performing districts tend to be led by district staff who:

1. Communicate a strong belief in the capacity of teachers and principals to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and in the district's capacity to develop the organizational conditions needed for that to happen.
2. Build consensus about core expectations for professional practice.
3. Set clear expectations for school leadership practices, and establish leadership development systems to select, train and assist principals and teacher leaders.

Expectations and accountability measures also emerged as a major focus for leadership activity throughout this investigation by Louis et al (2010) who found the following:

• In districts where levels of student learning are high, district leaders are more likely to emphasize goals and initiatives that reach beyond minimum expectations set by governments for student performance, while they continue to use government policy as a platform from which to challenge others to reach higher ground.
• School districts are able to influence teaching and learning, in part, through the contributions they make to positive feelings of efficacy on the part of school principals.
• Principals possessed of strong efficacy beliefs are more likely than others to undertake and persist in school-improvement projects.
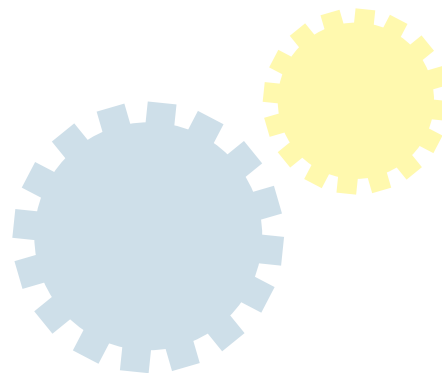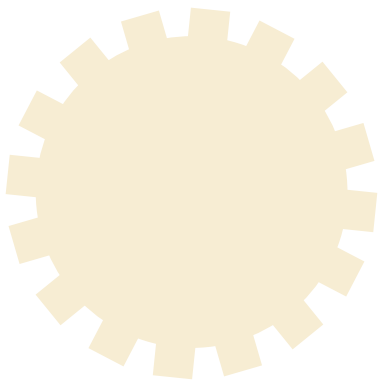
Making Connections:
How Goal Setting Interacts with
Other Core Leadership Capacities

As we consider each of the five CLCs, and develop our capacity as leaders, it is important to keep in mind that these capacities are integrated and interconnected. Our mastery of any individual capacity tends to support our effectiveness in other areas of leadership. For example, the two CLCs we have explored in previous issues – promoting collaborative learning cultures and engaging in courageous conversations are clearly linked to our capacity to set and achieve goals.

Setting and achieving goals relies on establishing a collaborative learning culture in which goals are created, understood, and carried out with shared commitment both to the end result and to the effort, persistence and professional learning that may be involved in achieving them.

Likewise, engaging in courageous conversations – those we often wish we could avoid, but which are essential to moving forward – are an integral and necessary part of the inevitable challenges we will encounter as we pursue the kind of goals the research tells us are most effective and motivating.

Equally, the establishment of effective and shared goals gives focus and meaning to the school's collaborative culture, and provides a clear platform for courageous conversations that address roadblocks and issues.
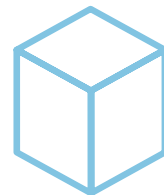
The Ontario Context: Setting Goals and the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012
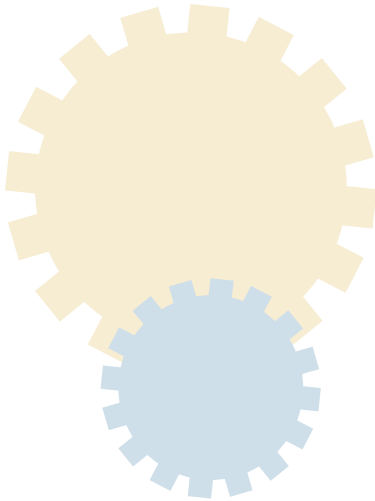
How are these research findings reflected in the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) 2012? Within the OLF, the core capacity "setting goals" is recognized as vital to successful leadership and is reflected within – and across – all of the framework's domains.

The framework recognizes that setting goals is about working with others to help ensure that goals are strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented and time-bound (SMART) and lead to improved teaching and learning. It also acknowledges that leaders do this in a variety of ways. For example, they:

- Develop and communicate a shared vision for the school that sets a context for goal setting
- Lead groups to use evidence and inquiry to establish goals, monitor progress and make adjustments to plans and/or practices
- Establish important linkages between individual goals, school improvement plans, and school board and provincial priorities.
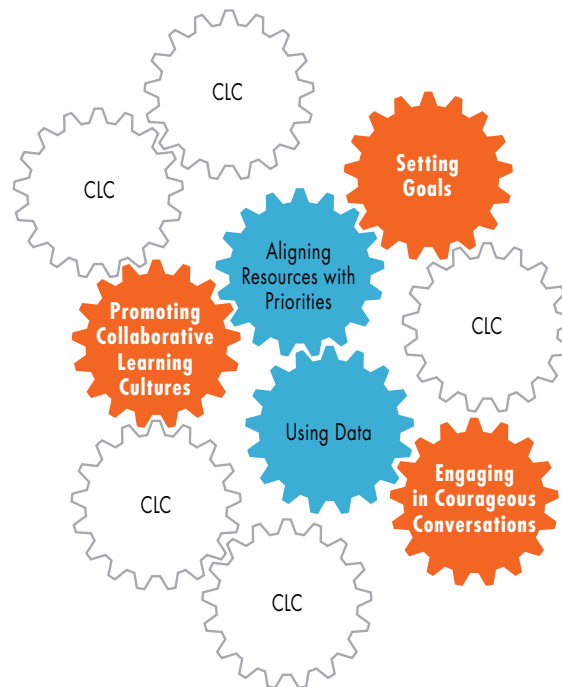
This table illustrates how "setting goals" is embedded in the *Ontario Leadership Framework 2012*

DOMAINS OF *THE ONTARIO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK 2012*	SELECTED SCHOOL-LEVEL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES & EXAMPLES OF WHAT THESE PRACTICES LOOK LIKE IN ACTION	PERSONAL LEADERSHIP RESOURCES: Leaders draw upon their personal leadership resources to effectively enact leadership practices
Setting Directions	• **Building a shared vision** – Help staff and diverse stakeholders understand the relationship between the school's vision and board and provincial policy initiatives and priorities • **Identifying specific, shared short-term goals** – Build consensus among students, staff and other stakeholders for the school's goals and priorities – Ensure the goals are clearly communicated to all stakeholders • **Communicating the vision and goals** – Use many different formal and informal opportunities to explain to stakeholders the overall vision and goals established for the school	
Building Relationships and Developing People	• **Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff** – Encourage staff to develop and review their own professional growth goals and their relationship to school goals and priorities • **Modelling the school's values and practices** – Have frequent, meaningful interactions with teachers, students and parents in order to further the school goals • **Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents** – Act in ways that consistently reflect the school's core values and priorities in order to establish trust	**Cognitive Resources:** • Problem-solving expertise • Knowledge of effective school and classroom conditions with direct effects on student learning **Social Resources:** • Perceiving emotions • Managing emotions • Acting in emotionally appropriate ways **Psychological Resources:** • Optimism • Self-efficacy • Resilience
Developing the Organization to Support Desired Practices	• **Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership** – Help develop clarity about goals and roles related to collaborative work – Involve staff in the design and implementation of important school decisions and policies • **Allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals** – Distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities – Ensure that ensure that sustained funding is directed to the school's improvement priorities	
Improving the Instructional Program	• **Staffing the instructional program** – Recruit and select teachers who have the interest and capacity to further the school's vision and goals • **Monitoring progress in student learning and school improvement** – Incorporate the explicit use of data when making decisions that relate to student learning and school improvement	
Securing Accountability	• **Building staff members' sense of internal accountability** – Help staff make connections between school goals and ministry goals in order to strengthen commitment to school improvement efforts • **Meeting the demands for external accountability** – Align school targets with board and provincial targets	

Setting Goals in Action: Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA)

This is an essential component of the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS), designed to help ensure that school leaders are supported in their growth and development. The appraisal process streamlines board practices and focuses efforts to achieve goals by providing formal and informal opportunities for feedback, dialogue, and on-going professional learning. Goals and priorities inform two key components of the appraisal process:

1. The Performance Plan
2. The Annual Growth Plan.

The Performance Plan, which is developed in an appraisal year, outlines performance goals, strategies/actions, methods and indicators, and corresponding leadership practices and personal leadership resources. It is developed by the appraisee in consultation with the appraiser.

The Annual Growth Plan provides a vehicle for the appraisee, in consultation with the appraiser, to identify strategies and actions for growth and development based on the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF). Five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs), derived from the OLF can further enhance the development and achievement of annual growth goals. The Annual Growth Plan supports the implementation of the Performance Plan in appraisal years and is used in the intervening years to support on-going dialogue and discussion.

Walking the Talk: Building Our Capacity for Setting Goals

How can we as leaders further develop our leadership practices and personal leadership resources in this critical area of leadership? The following is a brief sampling of current programs and resources that support the development of our capacity for setting goals.

Ministry Resources and Supports Available to Ontario Leaders:

- **The School Effectiveness Framework, K-12 (SEF)** is designed to support schools as they plan for improvement in student achievement and student success. By placing students at the centre, the school staff under the leadership of the principal focuses on a systematic self-assessment that leads to collaboration about how the staff as a whole can improve teaching and learning for our students. The SEF document cites the indicators and evidence of success for each of six core components. Analysis of a wide range of school and student achievement data identifies areas for attention and improvement. Use of the SEF as an analytical tool offers school staffs the opportunity to collaborate, align their practice, set goals for improved student achievement, share effective practice/strategies, and identify the professional learning that will build and enhance their capacity and lead to improved learning for all students.

- **Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA)** is a collaborative program between all school boards and the ministry aimed at growing the capacity of district leaders, principals, and teachers to better utilize evidence for improved student outcomes. Each board's MISA leader champions the use of data and evidence at the district, school and classroom levels. This often involves leading groups to establish goals, determining appropriate evidence to monitor progress, and making adjustments to plans and/or practices as needed. For example, in the Nippissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board the MISA leader works with system leaders, the Student Success lead, the district curriculum team and school leadership teams three times a year to review appropriate data to inform, monitor and adjust the Board Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans.

Setting Goals in Action: Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders

Mentoring for Newly Appointed School Leaders provides support for all newly appointed principals and vice-principals in their first and second years in the role. Mentoring is a powerful stimulus for the professional learning of new leaders and refers to a non-evaluative, trust-based relationship that focuses on the learning goals and needs of the mentee. The intent is to provide support tailored to the unique role of newly appointed school leaders so they can be successful in this important stage of their leadership career.

At the outset, the mentor and mentee develop a Mentee Learning Plan to focus the mentoring interactions and the growth and development priorities of the mentee. Effective goal setting guides and informs the development of the Learning Plan. Skilled mentors use questioning and feedback strategies to support the mentee to identify goals, growth and development strategies, timelines and resources to inform their plan.

The Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA) Annual Growth Plan (AGP), developed each year, and the Mentee Learning Plan complement each other and are mutually supportive. Mentees are encouraged to work with their mentor to use the goals, strategies/supports and target dates identified in their Annual Growth Plan to inform their Mentee Learning Plan.

Publications:

- *In Conversation* is a series of thought-provoking discussion papers designed to support professional learning and dialogue, available on the ministry's leadership website.

- *New Leader* provides practical strategies for student achievement. See for example 'Developing Principal Instructional Leadership: Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Classrooms' by Northeastern Catholic District School Board Director Paul Toffanello and Karen Rowe, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. *New Leader* is published by the Student Achievement Division and is available at www.inspirelearning.ca.

- *Principals Want to Know* is a series of tip sheets for principals that focuses on common issues faced in schools. Drawn from existing resources, these tips are designed to support instructional leadership practice. *Principals Want to Know* is sponsored by the Institute for Education Leadership (IEL) and is available at www.education-leadership-ontario.ca.

- *Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal "Setting Goals" Tip Sheet* outlines the SMART goals framework and is available at www.ontario.ca/eduleadership.

- *Conversation Starters* offers guiding questions to provide focus in professional dialogue including support for setting goals. This resource is helpful in a variety of contexts from daily interactions to more formal situations; for example, in the coaching conversations between mentors and mentees and the goal setting process of principals and superintendents during the performance appraisal process.

Webcasts:

- *K-12 School Effectiveness Framework* is a multi-media resource that supports professional learning and reflective practice to improve learning for all students. The six components outlined in this resource are:
  – Assessment for, as and of learning
  – School and Classroom Leadership
  – Student Voice
  – Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
  – Programs and Pathways
  – Home, School and Community Partnerships.

For each component in the SEF there are a number of indicators and some samples of evidence. In the multi-media resource, several video clips which demonstrate effective, evidence-based practice are highlighted for each indicator. This multi-media resource is aligned with the *School Effectiveness Framework* document.

Professional Learning Opportunities and Resources Offered by Ontario Leadership Associations:

- **The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)** invites educators to upload resources to APPLIKI, a succession planning search engine for Ontario educators that hosts a set of Leadership Self-Assessment Tools found at www.education-leadership-ontario.ca. The IEL library currently houses documents and articles to assist school and system leaders to develop their leadership capacity. To learn more about the work done by the IEL and to access resources including the APPLIKI site, visit www.education-leadership-ontario.ca/home.shtml.
  - The Applied Leadership program, coordinated by the IEL'S French language committee, aims at strengthening Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) through the setting of SMART goals in order to support data-driven decision-making and foster a trusting relationship among school leaders.

- **Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO) and Association des gestionnaires de l'éducation franco-ontarienne (AGÉFO):**
  ADFO uses the five Core Leadership Capacities as an essential foundation of the services and professional development opportunities it offers its members, including the following:
  - The *Diriger la réussite des élèves* program supports sharing of successful practices and the expansion of consultation networks across schools and school boards.
  - The Cultural Leadership Program (*Programme de leadership culturel*) aims to support principals and vice-principals in their role as instructional leaders who are focused on the promotion of the "construction identitaire" for students.
  To learn more about ADFO visit www.adfo.org.

AGÉFO is launching its first professional development program this year. It includes the following sessions:
– "Courageous Conversations" offers strategies for engaging in open-to-learning conversations with staff; for example, understanding personality types and active listening
– "Change Management" builds expertise in the areas of conducting an analysis of the organization, understanding dynamics and challenges linked to different scenarios, and determining appropriate change management strategies.

The internal bulletin *AGÉFO-INFO* shares monthly suggested readings for members. To learn more about AGÉFO visit www.agefo.ca.

- **Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO) and Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association (OCSOA):**
  CPCO provides support to leaders as they build capacity in the area of "setting goals." The Leading Student Achievement Project (LSA) is a powerful example of an embedded professional learning model that supports school leaders working with their staff using a "backward design/design down" inquiry strategy. This strategy focuses leaders on teaching, learning, student achievement and social goal setting.

  In the LSA project, the Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP), the LSA Theory of Action, and Ken Leithwood's conditions nested within the LSA Theory of Action are the models school leaders use for goal setting. School leaders work within their own in-school professional learning community and with colleagues in principal learning teams across schools to set goals and monitor work. These actions build capacity, adapt practice and impact school culture.

  The following big questions are used to set goals:
  – What is our data/information telling us about our students' learning needs?
  – What will we do to support our students', teachers' and parents' learning?
  – How will we know that our students have improved and what has made the difference?
  – What are the social actions that we will consciously attend to during our cycle?
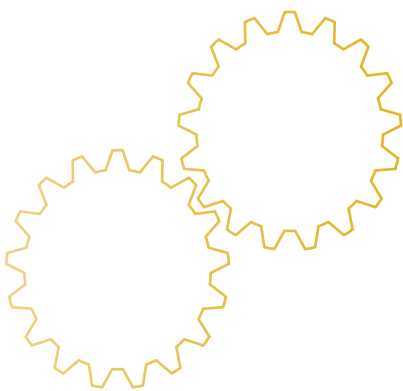
These four questions form the basis for goal setting and lead to de-privatization of practice, teaching-learning precision and personalization to meet individual student needs and student – teacher engagement.To learn more about CPCO visit www.cpco.on.ca.

OCSOA integrates the "setting goals" CLC as an essential focus of its Mentoring and Coaching Program in which its utilization of "active" mentors has resulted in the generation of a provincial "community of learners." Truly collaborative learning cultures are fostered as working relations are developed and insights are shared about effective leadership practices within different school boards. The approach to strengthening goal-setting capacity includes networking, the sharing of resources and access to a "field" expert to contact when needed. To learn more about OCSOA visit www.ocsoa.ca.

- **Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA):**
  OPC provides a full range of professional learning opportunities and resources that support the growth of collaborative schools. For example:
  - *SMART Goals:* The session provides instruction and professional dialogue in small groups, the opportunity to work through both non-academic and academic SMART goals and to review and discuss SMART goal samples.
  - *Principal Performance Appraisal (PPA):* This full-day session highlights the importance of the Principal/Vice-Principal Performance Appraisal process which is an essential component of the Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS).
  - *Principal Action Research: Leadership Capacity Building for Student Achievement:* Action research conducted by principals and vice-principals on their own practice empowers those who participate to improve leadership capacity, especially instructional leadership. The principal as action researcher develops the expertise to then facilitate teacher action research, with the goal of improving instructional practice and its impact on student achievement.

  To learn more about OPC visit www.principals.on.ca.

OPSOA continues to coordinate a strong mentoring program for new supervisory officers and directors of education emphasizing the collaborative role of the system leader in building a positive and active learning culture. The program utilizes the proven experience of veteran system leaders, reviews expert models and establishes networks. Efforts are made through all mentoring teams
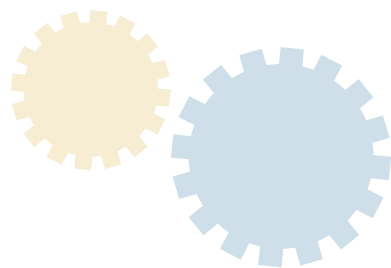
to establish system-wide learning organizations. OPSOA continues to work with OPC to strengthen the learning community concept of leadership. OPSOA is currently emphasizing technological awareness for its members asking superintendents to work within their districts to implement effective methods of employing new technology to strengthen learning and build achievement. To learn more about OPSOA visit www.opsoa.org.
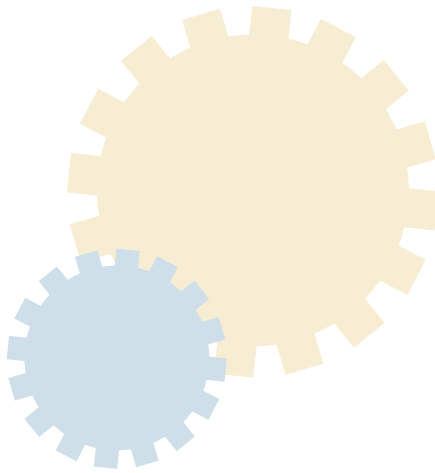
Selected Resources and Publications Recommended by Ontario Leaders:

Assessing Educational Leaders: Evaluating Performance for Improved Individual and Organizational Results, 2nd edition by Reeves (2009) is a field-tested resource that provides the information and tools recommended for successful evaluation of the performance of educational leaders and improved individual and organizational performance. Of particular relevance to the "setting goals" CLC is the planning, implementation, and monitoring (PIM) process Reeves outlines.

Building Shared Responsibility for Student Learning by Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) presents a practical framework for building shared responsibility within schools and school systems – one that is an ongoing activity – a journey not a destination that includes three critical components: focus, reflection and collaboration.

Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools, 2nd edition by Costa and Garmston (2002) offers guidelines for understanding the role and power of cognitive coaching to improve teaching, leading and learning.

District Leadership that Works: Striking the Right Balance by Marzano and Waters (2009) addresses the central research question: "What is the strength of relationship between district-level administrative actions and student achievement?"

Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us by Pink (2009) draws on four decades of scientific research on human motivation to examine what the author has identified as the three elements of true motivation – autonomy, mastery, and purpose and offers smart and surprising strategies for putting these into action.
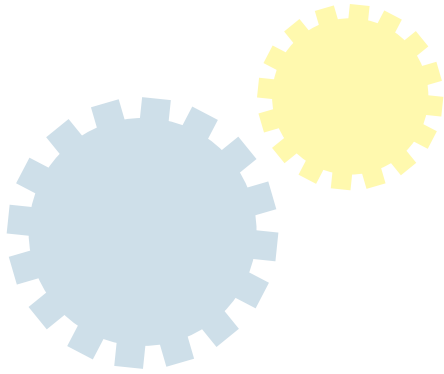
Finding Flow: the Psychology of Engagement in Everyday Life by Csikszentmihalyi (1997), which is based on a far-reaching study of thousands of individuals, contends that we often walk through our days unaware and out of touch with our emotional lives.

Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) is a new edition of Csikszentmihalyi's groundbreaking classic work on "flow." In it the author demonstrates the ways in which the positive state of flow can be controlled and not just left to chance.

Immunity to change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization by Kegan and Lahey (2009) examines why change is so hard, shows how our individual beliefs – along with the collective mindsets in our organizations – combine to create a natural but powerful immunity to change, and provides practical insights and tools to help unlock our potential to change and move forward.

Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning: Final Report of Research Findings by Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010) commissioned by the Wallace Foundation is the largest in-depth study of education leadership to date in the United States. The study provides insights into successful school leadership and begins by confirming a basic idea: among school-related influences on student learning, leadership is second in importance only to classroom instruction. The report also makes clear that although principals are the central leaders in schools, they are not the only leaders.

Leading Change in Your School: How to Conquer Myths, Build Commitment, and Get Results by Reeves (2009b) offers insights and recommendations in four areas: creating conditions for change, planning change, implementing change and sustaining change.

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success by Dweck (2006) distils decades of research to a simple pair of ideas. The author says that people can have two mindsets. Those with a "fixed mindset" believe that their talents and abilities are carved in stone. Those with a "growth mindset" believe that their talents and abilities can be developed. Dweck's message is "go with growth." In the book and on her website www.mindsetonline.com Dweck offers concrete steps for moving from a fixed to a growth mindset.

School Improvement for the Next Generation by White and Smith (2010) addresses fundamental shifts in thinking and practice that can empower educators to move beyond the same processes for improvement they have tried for years. The authors guide readers in a step-by-step process that includes collaboration, accountability, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and illustrates the importance of leadership to efficiently accomplish goals.

School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) has as its central question, "To what extent does leadership play a role in whether a school is effective or ineffective?"; that is, "How much of a school's impact on student achievement is due to the leadership displayed in that school?".

School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why – Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES] by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) confirms that school leaders can indeed make a difference to student achievement and well-being. It identifies, explains, and illustrates some of the specific ways in which they can do this. Its findings about goal setting in particular can be used by readers in their own contexts to support and develop the qualities of leadership that will enhance student success.

Strategy in Action: How School Systems Can Support Powerful Learning and Teaching by Curtis and City (2009) describes how school systems can engage effectively in the complex, challenging, and crucial work of systematically improving the quality of classroom instruction and the learning and achievement of all students.

Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Heath and Heath (2010) sheds new light on how we can effect transformative change. Switch shows that successful change follows a pattern, a pattern that can be used to make the changes that matter.

School Self-Assessment: The Road to School Effectiveness is the product of a partnership between the Ontario Principals' Council and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) in the United Kingdom (2008). This publication identifies excellent school leadership as the key to raising the standards of learner achievement. It outlines a process for implementing school self-assessment as a powerful tool that leaders can use for school improvement.
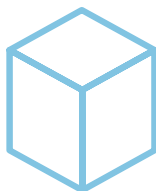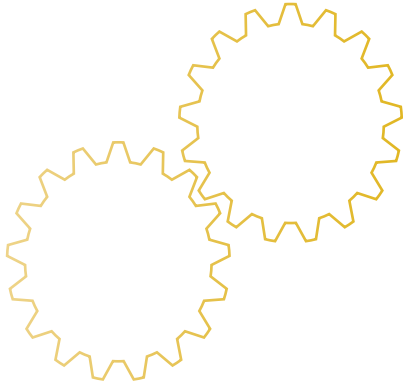
The Moral Imperative Realized by Michael Fullan (2011) takes the subject of moral leadership to the next level by showing how to put change into practice at the local and system levels. Fullan explains how the combined forces of shared leadership make the difference and outlines proven ways to create a culture of moral leadership, drive change with school leaders, achieve system wide progress and avoid educational blind alleys.

The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life by Damon (2008) focuses on setting and achieving goals within a specific context. In conducting research with Howard Gardner and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi on individuals who made positive contributions to society, Damon was struck by the fact that these individuals were almost universally guided by a strong sense of a larger purpose. In this book, Damon explores the questions of how young people find a sense of purpose, what happens when they don't and how schools can help.

The Power of SMART Goals: Using Goals to Improve Student Learning by Conzemius and O'Neill (2006) presents several frameworks for adult and student goal setting. Since 1997, these authors have been teaching a model and process for setting the type of goals that the research tells us are most likely to generate successful results. "SMART" goals are: Strategic and Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely, and Tangible. This book provides practical strategies for goal setting including dealing with barriers to goal setting and monitoring, approaches for "keeping goals alive" through supportive systems, policies, structures and skill-building.
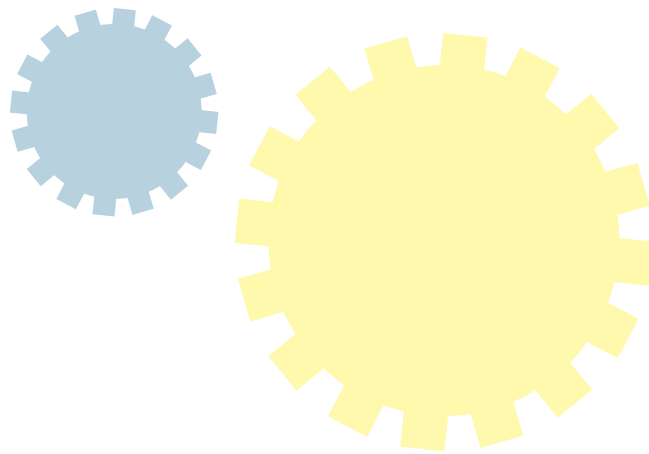
Continuing the Dialogue: What You Told Us

Ideas Into Action is designed to support the capacity building being undertaken by the ministry, Ontario's provincial leadership associations, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and districts. It is intended to contribute to your ongoing professional learning and to provide you and your colleagues with a meaningful springboard for reflection and professional dialogue and for putting these ideas into action.

Promoting Collaborative Learning Cultures – Reader Insights and Perspectives

In the last issue of *Ideas Into Action* which focused on the CLC "promoting collaborative learning cultures" we asked you to share your thoughts and insights. Here is a sampling of your comments:

From a School Effectiveness Lead:
- As I reflect on "the difference that makes the difference" in supporting all learners I think one of the most powerful things we do as system leaders is be the "lead learner" within the school community...students, teachers, support staff, parents and families all need to see principals and vice-principals learning *with* them – along side – letting our vulnerabilities as learners and leaders be visible and allowing all the risks associated with new learning to shine through. In this way we continue to deepen our understanding and develop and give permission to those around us to take the risks and persist through failure.

From a Student Achievement Officer:
- What builds and strengthens collaborative learning cultures is discourse about instruction and leadership in principal learning teams that have established trust and supportive relationships. Many of the ministry-developed resources stand out as having been very effective in promoting this kind of dialogue and discussion; for example, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat webcasts such as "Student-Led Conferences" available at www.curriculum.org/secretariat/studentled/index.shtml, and the *In Conversation* discussion papers such as the interview with Steve Munby titled "The Authentic Leader," available at www.ontario.ca/eduleadership.

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From a Teacher Leader:

- The work of creating authentic collaborative learning cultures is a journey that sometimes feels like creating an oil painting. It takes time and sometimes certain groups go further in their development than others. Sometimes I have to walk away and let things dry and look at parts with fresh eyes before I try another strategy to move us further. My greatest learning over the last five years in the role of teacher leader has been with four small schools. We began networking before it became fashionable!

  The schools were so small that we moved to four-school collaboration – deprivatizing practice was not a choice – it had to happen. With only one or two teachers at most per grade level teachers truly appreciated working together for student learning. I feel the work to develop these cultures is always unfinished. I find it truly exciting!

Some insights of a teacher leader on successful strategies for promoting collaborative learning cultures:

- Engage in *real* work that supports the students in our classrooms *right now* and most often using the *Teaching-Learning Critical Pathway (T-LCP)*
- Embed norms of collaboration through authentic practice by facilitating opportunities for teams to be together frequently over an extended period of time
- Have consultants, coordinators and principals model the skills of collaboration
- Find opportunities to reflect on ongoing work together and to provide feedback about learning
- Gradually release responsibility over time to others within group meetings to empower members of the learning community
- Provide space for future teacher leaders within the group to develop and grow
- Increase opportunities for teachers to feel a sense of ownership and efficacy in their ongoing work to improve student achievement
- Articulate that our work is about inquiry and investigation and that when things aren't working it's okay to say "Let's consider: the why and the '*so what*' leading to the '*now what*' as we tweak and revise in that constant pursuit of improving on our previous best"
- Identify two or three precise targets and goals that "do good" for kids and are not only aligned within the school but also reflect board and ministry priorities
- Communicate targets and goals to our various stakeholders so that they are also able eventually to articulate them to help ensure that our roadway is clear to all
- Be sensitive to the unique profiles of our learners – adult and young – in order to allow access to the talents and strengths that each brings to the table

From Mentor/Mentee Teams:

- The seeds of a collaborative learning culture are present in every school. In some high schools, they can be widely scattered and narrow in their focus. Understanding and validating the work of each group – literacy, numeracy, Student Success, safe schools and the School Effectiveness Framework (SEF) Team or School Growth Team – is important. It is also important to provide direction and clearly articulate how the goals of each group align with the board pillars and ministry priorities and to refine the goals as needed.

- The SEF review process was a particularly effective support for strengthening and promoting a collaborative learning culture within the school. The Board SEF lead worked closely with our SEF team to make the process meaningful and effective in building a school-wide improvement focus.

From Principal Congress Participants:

- I purposefully created a collaborative culture at the school working with the strengths of the staff. Most staff already believed that all students could be successful but did not think that they were capable of delivering what was needed given the demands of the curriculum. Creating a collaborative culture not only empowered teachers towards greater self-efficacy but also empowered students.

- Through fostering a trusting relationship with staff we were able not only to implement change but also to get staff excited about the "creative tension" and move instructional practice beyond the "norm." Many staff developed greater self-efficacy and their enthusiasm about how their students were achieving brought along other staff who were still hanging on to familiar practice.

- Every day I work with staff to develop a positive attitude. We have tried to become part of a "complaint-free world." We can identify and discuss situations that can be changed but if a situation cannot be changed, we do not complain. We know that we must change our attitude towards that situation.
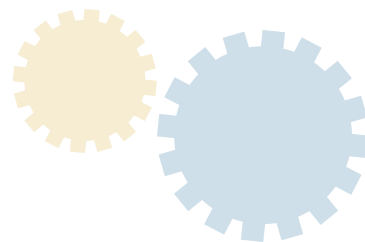
- Listening to the needs of the staff and getting my own hands dirty in the process served as the key practice that affected change. Staff recognized that I did not have all the answers, was willing to say so and knew where to go to get the assistance that we needed. Inviting others to share in the growth that our staff had made was critical.

The Institute for Education Leadership (IEL)

Ontario's Institute for Education Leadership is a unique partnership committed to exploring leading-edge thinking on education leadership and applying that expertise to the development of high-quality resources and learning opportunities for school, board, and system leaders.

As part of its work on research into practice the IEL has adopted the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) and continues to support and promote it as a powerful vehicle for strengthening school and system leadership in the province.
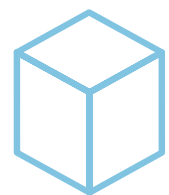
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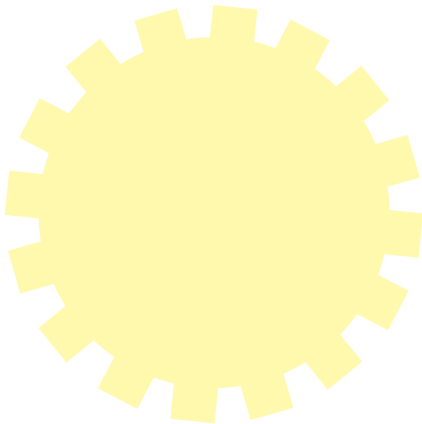
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