

EFFECTIVE GOAL AND TARGET-SETTING:

So, what have you decided to accomplish this year?

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SUMMARY: National goals towards improving and maintaining high levels of learning outcomes for every learner in all schools are encapsulated in the National Development Plan (NDP). These goals (and their associated annual improvement targets) find expression in the Department of Basic Education's *Action plan to 2019* (the sector plan).

At school level, two factors undermine the successful implementation of the sector plan:

- Most schools, particularly primary schools, do not set goals and targets as part of their school improvement planning process.
- Not all staff members at every level of the school have ownership of the improvement targets, and take responsibility for them.

The purpose of this policy brief is to present good practices from school that work about effective goal and target-setting, including how to develop and implement improvement strategies to achieve the set goals, monitor progress against set goals and targets, and report assessment results to the school community and parents.

INTRODUCTION

The National Development Plan (NDP) outlines the government's intention to improve learning outcomes at all levels in the education system. This intention is expressed through goals and improvements targets.

The Department of Basic Education's *Action plan to 2019* (the sector plan) marks the

government's commitment to ensuring that every learner in this country, regardless of his or her home background and socio-economic status, receives quality education. The sector plan translates goals encapsulated in the NDP into an actionable plan. However, two factors at the school level undermine the successful implementation of the sector plan:

First, the national goals and targets must find expression in school goals and targets, which must be included in their school improvement plans. But most schools, particularly primary schools, do not set goals and targets as part of their school improvement planning process.

Second, school-wide target-setting is best initiated at the classroom level, where teachers can identify particular learners or groups of learners needing a particular focus. Targets can then be established and owned at department level, then incorporated into school-wide targets. This would enable staff members at every level of the school to have ownership of the targets, and to take responsibility for them. Regrettably, this practice does not prevail in many schools.

SETTING SCHOOL-WIDE GOALS

Without goals a school lacks focus and direction. Goal-setting not only allows a school to take control of direction it must take, it also provides a benchmark for determining whether a school is actually succeeding.



This policy brief illustrates how goal-setting in schools that work¹ is a process that starts with careful consideration of what they want to achieve, and ends with a lot of hard work to actually do it. These schools design SMART (*specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound*) goals which resonate well with the national goals as encapsulated in the NDP and sector plan.

THE TARGET-SETTING PROCESS

Schools that work employ an effective target-setting process. This process is presented in the form of a wheel to illustrate its cyclical nature:



How can a school set the right performance targets? Briefly discussed next are lessons how schools that work use an effective process to set goals that encourage all staff members to be more focused, succeed in their efforts and drive superior performance.

STEP 1: GATHER APPROPRIATE INFORMATION

Schools that work use summative, diagnostic and formative assessments to gather information about the level of learner achievement and the reasons why learners

¹ In April 2017, the Minister of Basic Education commissioned NEEDU to conduct the *Schools that Work II* study. This study sought to examine the characteristics of top-performing schools in South Africa. The best practices discussed in this advocacy brief are based on the findings of that study. The full report is available on the Department of Basic Education website: www.education.gov.za.

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are achieving at that level. This is discussed further in Policy Brief N-04 which is part of a series of policy briefs by NEEDU exploring best practices from the *Schools that Work II* study.

Learner achievement data is derived from two main sources ...



- The end-of-year results including the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results
- Teachers' formative assessment results, which teachers gather at the classroom level



Equipped with clear, reliable, specific, and regular assessment results, these schools are able to figure out what is working and what needs improvement.

STEP 2: ANALYSE THE INFORMATION IN CONTEXT

To derive meaning from assessment results, teachers in high-performing schools dig deeper into their results than just calculating average percentages per class and presenting the spread of performance in terms of the proportions of learners who achieved specific levels of performance.

The analysis of results tells us not only learners who underperform but also teachers whose classes underperform. (Teacher, School LI-Quintile 4)

Looking at the performance of individual learners, groups of learners, as well as grade-level and school-wide performance, these teachers identify...



- Levels of achievement and establish an expectation for future achievement
- Areas that need to be addressed to improve levels of achievement
- Strategies needed to address areas of deficiency (the improvement plan)

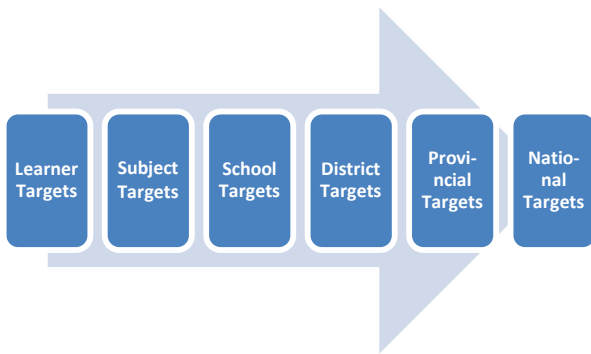


How assessment results are analysed meaningfully, is the subject of Policy Brief N-04.



STEP 3: SET MEASURABLE PERFORMANCE TARGETS

Many high-performing schools acknowledge that achieving the national targets (discussed above) begins with schools meeting individual learner targets. Thus, targets are set at different levels chronologically as follows:



Learners' targets: Each learner is encouraged to set his or her own goals and targets. All learners have and are aware of their targets:

We monitor their performance against their own targets. We say to them 'Check yourself how far you are from your target.' (Teacher, **School FC-Quintile 3**)

Subject targets: Each subject has got its own performance target:

Each teacher sets a target to say 'In this Learning Area I'm aiming to get most learners at this level. This helps us every time we engage learners after monthly tests and quarterly tests.' (Teacher, **School FC-Quintile 3**)

Schools targets: School-wide targets are also set at the beginning of the year. As in the example below, these targets are clearly expressed or are SMART, i.e. specific, measurable, ambitious but achievable, relevant and time-limited:

This year, our target is 100% pass rate—which we have achieved for the past five years—100% bachelors, and we want to get 100% pass in all the subjects. (HOD, **School KF-Quintile 4**)

The schools that work use targets that they have set to measure the impact or the success of their improvement strategies. School-based targets help these schools to raise national expectations as outlined in the NDP.

STEP 4: USE PERFORMANCE TARGETS TO GUIDE IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

High-performing schools understand that targets alone do not bring about improvement. Thus, in these schools, target-setting goes hand-in-hand with an action plan of how the targets will be met. Put differently, school improvement planning, discussed in detail in Policy Brief N-02, is done at the same time as target-setting.

In schools that work, using performance targets to guide improvement planning involves the following:



- **Effective improvement planning:** School improvement plans:
 - ✓ consider *past performance*
 - ✓ set *targets* for improvement
 - ✓ articulate the *strategies* for meeting those targets
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation of improvement strategies is an essential step in the improvement process. Targets are used to evaluate the impact.
- **Reviews and refinements:** The evidence gathered through monitoring and evaluation helps schools to:
 - ✓ determine whether their improvement strategies are effective
 - ✓ review their goals and improvement targets annually where necessary
 - ✓ refine goals and targets for future years



STEP 5: REPORT TARGETS AND RESULTS TO ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is central to the target-setting process. After every formal assessment, schools that work identify gaps between a desired learning goal and the learners' present status towards that learning goal.



Thereafter, these schools respond to the analysis of formative assessment results by holding everybody accountable for learner performance.

A quintile 1 top-performing school, describes how different role players are held accountable for improved learner academic achievement:

We then look for possible explanations in the evidence about each learner, teacher, parent and SMT member that we keep at the school. This evidence is prepared ahead of time and is brought to the accounting session:

Holding learners accountable:

We look at

- a) his/her attendance and tardiness record
- b) whether she/he "bunks" classes [plays truant]
- c) her/his conduct in class and at school
- d) whether she/he attends extra classes as required
- e) whether she/he does her /his class work and homework

If the record shows that she, for example, bunks classes and she does not do her homework, then we put it to her that she is contributing to her lack of success.

The **recommended action** for her is that she has to improve on these two things next time.

Holding teachers accountable:

We present evidence about:

- a) the number of occasions when the teacher came late to class
- b) the number of occasions he or she missed a lesson (for whatever reason)
- c) the number of occasions he or she arrived late at school in the morning

We then put to him that there is no way learners would learn if he continues to miss his periods or whatever the case may be.

The **recommended action** is that the teacher must improve on these indicators. He or she must make-up for the lost time and this must be documented.

After every assessment, there are accounting sessions where teachers are required to account for the quality of the results. (Teacher, **School GN-Quintile 3**).

Holding parents accountable:

We show the parent the number of times he has been informed by the school that his child:

- a) is absent from schools
- b) arrives late in the morning
- c) bunks classes
- d) misbehaves in class and at school
- e) does not attend extra classes as required
- f) does not do his class work and homework

We then put to him [the parent] that his failure to respond when the school notifies him about these issues and his failure to work with the school to address them have contributed to his child not doing well.

The **recommended action** for the parent is to take the necessary actions immediately when the school alerts him about things that would result in his child not achieving the set targets.

Holding SMT members accountable:

We present evidence about what the SMT member did when he realised that the parent was not responding to the communique from the schools, and when the teacher was not honouring her periods. If he sat with this information and did nothing with it, then we put it to him that he contributed to the learner's poor performance.

*At the end of it all, everybody is held accountable. We all don't like accountability sessions because we all have to account in front all four stakeholders [the learner, the parent, the teacher and the SMT member]. We all have to sit on that hot seat. Imagine when you have to account in front of the learner for not doing your work. Who wants that? (Principal, **School LN-Quintile 1**)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools *should not* regard the target-setting process as a new and separate improvement-planning activity. Schools are encouraged to integrate target-setting with their school improvement planning process.

Goals should first be set for a school year's end but divided and back-mapped by school quarter, month, and even week, if possible. This type of planning makes goals much more actionable, allowing schools to better identify steps needed to meet end-of-the-year targets.

