

INFORMATION PAPER 6

GOAL STATEMENTS

The preparation of a specific goal statement is an essential step in a problem-solving approach to improving student performance. Without a precise definition of the goal, it is impossible to make judgments about the amount of progress that a student may be making, or the relative effectiveness of interventions.

In the past, goal-setting has been somewhat problematic. Goal statements were not always based on assessment data and did not always directly relate to specific performance concerns. Some goal statements were written too broadly or vaguely, and, therefore, were unmeasurable. Other goal statements were too specific, and, thus, were too time consuming for frequent, repeated progress monitoring (Shinn, Nolet & Knutson, 1990).

As part of a systematic problem-solving approach, goal statements should be developed from functional assessment data, and should be directly related to the identified areas of concern. Goal statements should be written in specific measurable terms that can be evaluated frequently and efficiently. The remainder of this information paper will provide a definition for goal statements, and a description of the procedures used to develop them.

DEFINITION

A goal statement is a specific description of the desired change in student performance that should occur as the result of an intervention. The goal statement should describe three components: 1) a specific behavior to be measured, 2) the conditions under which that behavior will be exhibited, and 3) a criterion or level of behavior that is to be achieved.

Two types of goal statements exist. Program modification or exit goal statements should be written for students who receive special services or are placed in special programs. These goal statements should describe the behaviors and criterion levels that a student must achieve in order to be considered for a change in services or exit from a specific instructional program such as the resource room. Long-term or annual goals describe the amount of progress a student is expected to make over the course of an academic year. Finally, short-term objectives are derived from long-term goals. Short-term objectives are based on the conditions, behaviors and criteria defined in long-term goals, but they describe only a portion of the progress that a student is expected to make over a much shorter period of time.

PROCEDURES FOR WRITING GOAL STATEMENTS

Goal statements should be written by defining the following components:

1) the behavior. The target behavior selected for the goal statement should be observable, measurable and specific. Whenever possible, the behavior should be a positive one that is to be learned or increased in frequency, rather than a negative or inappropriate behavior for which the goal would be elimination or a decrease in frequency. An example of an academic target behavior might be "will read aloud." An example of a non-academic target behavior might be "will complete daily written assignments."

2) the conditions under which the behavior is to be exhibited. For an academic goal, the conditions include the timeline for completion of the goal (e.g., "in 30 weeks"), the measurement situation in which the behavior is to be exhibited (e.g., "when presented with random reading passages), and the measurement materials to be used (e.g., "from Scott Foresman, 1987, Level 10").

For most academic behaviors, a long-term approach to measurement should be used. With a long-term approach, the timeline for completion of a goal might span an entire school year. The measurement situation should provide specific information about the manner in which the academic behavior is to be elicited. The measurement materials to be used should represent the level of the

curriculum in which the student might be expected to perform in one year. A complete statement of conditions for an academic behavior might read as follows: "In 30 weeks, when presented with random reading passages from Scott Foresman, 1987, Level 10, . . ."

For non-academic behaviors, the conditions under which the behavior is to be exhibited should include the timeline for completion (e.g., "In nine weeks"), the setting(s) in which the behavior is to be exhibited (e.g., "during math class"), and the environmental stimuli that will elicit the behavior (e.g., "by the end of the math period"). The timeline for completion of most non-academic goals is likely to be relatively short, especially for more disruptive or aggressive behaviors. Goal writers should be specific about the settings and environmental stimuli pertinent to the goal. A complete statement of conditions for a non-academic goal might read: "In nine weeks during math class, [Jean will complete daily written assignments] by the end of the math period."

3) the criterion or level of behavior expected of the student. There are a number of performance standards that may be used to establish an appropriate criterion. One very useful standard is that of peer performance or local norms. Other useful standards might include performance guidelines for instructional placement, school policy with regard to such behaviors as attendance or tardiness, or teacher expectations and expert judgment.

The "ambitiousness" of the goal is an important issue in selecting an appropriate criterion level. The criterion should be set high enough so that the goal reflects a worthy improvement in student performance. Fuchs and Shinn (1989) cite research which found that more ambitious goals were associated with better growth in skills. On the other hand, criterion levels should be realistic, in that they describe an achievable outcome for a particular student within a given time period. Goal writers should keep both factors in mind when establishing criterion levels. They should take into account the student's current performance level and the discrepancy between expected and actual performance. For most students, the ultimate goal of an intervention is to reduce or eliminate this performance discrepancy. If a goal statement is not sufficiently ambitious, students are less likely to succeed in reducing the gap between their actual and expected levels of performance.

A criterion level for an academic behavior might be "50 words correct per minute." A criterion level for a non-academic behavior might be "four out of five assignments."

EXAMPLES OF GOAL STATEMENTS

Based on the component examples described above, the following are examples of complete goal statements:

Academic Long-Term Goal Statement:

"In 30 weeks, when presented with random reading passages from Scott Foresman, 1987, Level 10, Sam will read aloud at a rate of 50 words correct per minute."

Academic Short-Term Objective:

"Each week, when presented with random reading passages from Scott Foresman, 1987, Level 10, Sam will increase his oral reading rate by two words correct per minute."

Non-Academic Goal Statement:

"In nine weeks during math class, Jean will complete all daily written assignments by the end of each math period."

SUMMARY

Specific goal statements are essential to a clear understanding of the desired outcomes of an intervention. Without such goal statements, it is impossible to make judgments about student progress or to evaluate interventions. Goal statements should be measurable, and should allow for frequent and efficient progress monitoring. Goals should be ambitious in that they define a level of improvement which will help to reduce or eliminate the discrepancy between the student's expected and actual performance levels. Goals should also be realistic in that they take into account current performance levels and describe achievable outcomes.

REFERENCES

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