

Setting Coaching Cycle Goals

Goal setting

All instructional coaching involves setting goals. In fact, the very definition of coaching is built on the presence of clear, focused goals related to teacher practice and student achievement. While not necessarily the first step in every coaching relationship, formal coaching cycles should be guided by goals articulated by the teacher and informed by larger school improvement priorities. *From Coaching Cycles in EL Education Schools.*

Goal setting based on the purpose and approach to coaching

One of the primary differences between a teacher-centered and a student-centered coaching cycle is the goal. While the purpose of ALL instructional coaching is to improve student achievement, the goal in a teacher-centered coaching cycle centers on teacher practice. For example, “The teacher will effectively demonstrate all components of the workshop model.” In contrast, student-centered coaching cycles focus on student outcomes such as “Students will make inferences from a variety of texts.” (For more information on the approaches to coaching see *Two Approaches to Coaching* in Section 1: Overview Documents.)

Where do goals come from?

Usually goals support school improvement priorities. Based on these broad priorities, the coach helps the teacher narrow his or her objectives and select pre-assessment data to guide specific goal setting.

What if my teacher isn’t “ready” for a goal connected to the school improvement priorities?

At times a teacher—particularly one new to the school or the profession—may not be “ready” to address the school improvement goal. Instead, he or she may need support with classroom management or basic instructional practices. Approach these situations on a case by case basis in communication with school leaders. In these situations, a teacher-centered coaching cycle may be most effective.

How can I help teachers accurately self assess and set the “right” goal?

As a coach, your role is to ask good questions (see below) to elicit a possible goal. Once the teacher has identified an area of focus, analyzing related data is a critical next step. Do the students (or a group of students) really NEED this work? Is this work high leverage? Ultimately, the “right” goal is one that the teacher is committed to and enthusiastic about. Forcing a goal on the teacher does not honor him or her as a professional and adult learner and is not likely to be productive.

What if my teacher wants to do something else?

In EL Education schools we believe in the power of whole school improvement and moving toward common priorities. In most cases, teachers are encouraged to align coaching goals, school improvement priorities, and the work plan. However, context matters. Use your knowledge of the school and the individual teacher in collaboration with school leaders when making this decision.

We’re halfway in and the goal is wrong. What should I do?

One of the roles of the coach is to strike the balance between responsiveness and movement toward a particular goal. Use your professional judgment—if the goal just isn’t right adjust it accordingly. If possible evaluate student data to confirm your instincts (especially if they are counter to those of the teacher.)

What are the characteristics of strong goals?

In general, strong instructional coaching cycle goals have the characteristics of SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely). A strong goal is:

- Student success on this goal will have a significant impact on student learning.
- Tied to larger school improvement priorities and the work plan. It strikes a balance between **coherence** with the school focus and the value of inquiry.
- Informed by student-level data.
- Clear about **WHAT** students will achieve and **HOW** they will achieve it.
- “Doable”—it’s narrow enough that teachers can take it on and see real progress on over the course of the coaching cycle.
- Measurable for students and the teacher. There are concrete data or evidence that can be collected to measure the goal.
- An invitation into the inquiry process. The teacher wants to grapple with it.

What questions could I use to help teachers set goals?

Questions to elicit possible goals

The following are possible questions from templates and agendas found in Section 5: Tools to Implement Instructional Coaching Cycles:

- What do you hope students will learn as a result of our coaching work?
- What is the student work or data that could help us decide on a focus that would make the most impact with students?
- How would you describe your students as (readers)? (strengths and challenges)
- What are your hopes for your students as (readers) as a result of our coaching work?
- What data could we use to pre-assess your students to see how they are doing?

Questions to narrow the instructional coaching cycle goal

- What does the data suggest about student needs?
- What does this data lead you to wonder about your students or your instructional practice?
- Are there specific students or groups of students who you have concerns about?
- What aspect of this work feels most important to you or will have the greatest impact on student learning beyond this coaching cycle?
- Over the coming weeks, what amount of student growth would you find realistic AND inspiring?