

Share

Engage students and families in each student's growth by sharing progress and inviting student-driven improvements.

"The really fun part of the growth goals and trackers is, it's not just the teachers who look at their goals—today I watched a kid count how many levels they needed to make their end of year goal."—*Multi-Classroom Leader® Kristin Cabbage McMahon*

Students and families want to know and understand what they're reaching for in each class. Great teachers share data to energize students, guide students' choices in learning, and promote family support and communication.

Sharing data with students and families about student growth compared with goals students help set includes these actions:

- * **Involve students in setting their own goals**
- * **Provide frequent, timely data so students can track growth against goals**
- * **Guide student choices during the year based on students' own goals and belief that students can raise their bar**
- * **Share data with families to help them support their children and teens at home**

Involve students in setting their own goals

When students—even young children—set their own goals, say teachers in the Multi-Classroom Leader® (MCL™) role, they become more invested and involved in learning. Show them the data behind their goals, and help them aim high.

"It's important that the students know **where they are and where they need to be**. If not, it's just another number on a paper, and they don't understand what high growth is or what proficiency is, or why they need to make this particular score."—*MCL™ Candace Butler*

Use the early days of the school year to set goals, establishing a culture of growth from the beginning.

MCL™ Frank Zaremba leads his teaching team to start those conversations immediately. "They've even started doing it in kindergarten, where they're having the kids goal-set: So what do you want to be able to do? I'm hearing things we're going to be working on, whether it's be able to count to 100 or know all your letter sounds, things like that. In the fourth- and fifth-graders it is a lot more—we use MAP [Measures of Academic Progress] testing as one of our data points, so the

students will see their math score and where it correlates to the grade-level benchmarks. So they'll set goals around that and even within the different domains, for numbers in operations."

Setting their own goals empowers students to talk to their teachers, "to **be their own advocate** for themselves, like, 'I have a 75 in your class, what can I do to increase my grade?'"—*MCL™ Bobby Miles*

MCL™ Erin Burns agrees that students need to understand where they started, and recalibrate after benchmarks. Teachers say allowing students to see how much they grow when challenged creates excitement in the classroom.

"We use data as talking points basically every Friday. We want to use it to reward students, so we have data trackers, and students are tracking their own data towards that goal, and then they know if they make their personalized data goal. They also get to check it off on the class tracker. It's kind of been **built into the culture** of students always reaching to have something to achieve."—*MCL™ Erin Burns*

At MCL™ Erin Williams' middle school, "you walk in the hallway, you see the kids going, 'Yeah, I got 15 points growth—what did you do?' There's **that positive culture that we're building**, where kids are learning to be accountable, and they're learning to really be invested in their learning and do their best."

Having students physically write down their growth goals helps create accountability, Master Reach Teacher Jimmel Williams says.

"After they write the goals, every single week we have a quiz, and at the end of that quiz they talk about are they contributing to that goal or are they not contributing to

that goal? And what can they do to do better or improve the next week?" he says.

Provide frequent, timely data so students can track growth against goals

Great teachers build time into their classes for students to track and reflect on their growth, with many relying on data notebooks to guide students.

MCL™ Amber Hines uses individualized student data notebooks for regular check-ins and conversations for her elementary students. Students track their lessons, classroom assessments, and benchmark testing. "The students are graphing and charting and **taking ownership of their learning**," Hines says.

Scott Nolt, a high school blended-learning teacher, says he keeps student data notebooks organized and simplified, but sometimes students struggle to understand. To ensure that students track growth against goals, Nolt tries to communicate often and explain the data in simple ways.

Middle school MCL™ Erin Williams has seen the benefits of having students track and reflect on their progress. "We have our students do data trackers where they monitor their proficiency levels—red, yellow, and green per standard. **We found a lot of growth** with that; we feel like it has increased the level of accountability for students. You hear those conversations like, 'I'm really improving. I didn't so well with this standard—here is why, I think,' and I think the caveat to all of that is giving them that reflection time," she says. "At the bottom of our data tracker we have, 'comment on the standard that you did the best, explain why'; 'comment on the standard that you feel was the weakest for you and explain why.' Sometimes it's as simple as 'I just didn't take my time, it was at the end of the four-hour testing block and I got tired and so I just gave up.' And then sometimes it's more: 'I've always struggled with informational text.' It allows teachers that extra piece of data to then have those intentional conferences with students to allow them to move beyond."

Guide student choices during the year based on students' own goals and belief that students can raise their bar

Knowing their goals helps students make choices about their learning.

"I think behind student choice is empowerment," Scott Nolt says. "**We're empowering students** to take responsibility for their own learning, to make it authentic to them and their needs."

To promote students' belief that they can achieve their goals, MCL™ Fred Hoffmann breaks down standards for students by having them write manageable "I can" statements.

Tracking growth against goals creates a trajectory for students, Erin Williams says. "When we're able to show [students] by means of their data tracker or conversations or assessments that they're growing, that they were a 'Level 1' and now they're a 'Level 2'—that really **sparks a lot of interest in our kids**."

Senior Reach Teacher Katie McAuliffe reconsidered student goals midway through the year. Her struggling students, McAuliffe says, "tell me when things are too hard, and then I try to go back and scaffold it for them, and it's great to hear them be like, 'I got this!'"

For students working on more advanced material, McAuliffe realized that their original goals did not aim high enough, and listened to students who asked for the materials and support to tackle new topics.

Share data with families to help them support their children and teens at home

At every level—elementary through high school—teachers must share and help families understand the data on their student's progress—both their strengths and weaknesses.

Sharing data with families will be easier if teachers start building connections with them early in the year, MCL™ Candace Butler says. "Teachers used to laugh at me at high school because I would call and say, 'Hey, this is Ms. Butler, I have your child for 11th grade AP—I'm so excited that they are ready to push themselves!' Teachers were like, 'You're still calling parents?' Yes! I was the one who had all the parents showing up. I want everybody to be invested, and **we can't help children if the parents aren't involved** in that process."

To gain parents' trust, MCL™ Katherine Smith says, "I'm in communication with parents over the phone all the time, and **I definitely like to call to celebrate good things** and to celebrate the things that the students are doing that are helping our building grow. I think that the communication is just a constant cycle and it never really ends."

Some teachers have students lead meetings with their parents, to explain their own learning data.

"We educate parents, because they don't know what a benchmark score of 215 is, or a 221—they have no idea if that is good or bad," Erin Williams says. Having

students lead a conference about those scores and their learning levels can remove a bit of the conference anxiety teachers have, and help students to fully understand and articulate their data and goals, she says. “It’s allowing parents to learn from their own child—what is that expectation, show me what your data looks like, show me how what you’re doing is preparing you for that level?”

MCL™ Jacqueline Smith’s school started holding a “State of Our Child” night in spring.

“Most schools have a big open house night or curriculum night; after the first report card, most schools have one conference and then, from there if your kid is doing great you probably never hear from the teacher for the rest of the year. And if there is somewhere where the kid’s not doing well, you might get a phone call or be invited in for a conference,” Smith says. “Well, for State of Our Child night, we invite all the parents back and we share with them the data thus far, and **we let them know this is where your child is and how they can support them**, not just for the rest of the year but into the summer. We give them resources that help their students, not just ’til the end of the year in order for them to master the assessment, but also over the summer. We make sure that they understand that we value their support in helping their child reach their goals as well.”

MCL™ Lance Kanter teaches at a high school with a high population of refugee and immigrant families. One year when homework was not getting done, he convened a parent meeting for the math department that resulted in higher homework completion rates and parent involvement.

“We gave a presentation on how they can best help their kids and what to expect,” Kanter says. “We’re trying our best to show the kids that it is cool to learn, it is cool to get a good grade, and where they can go from here. One of the first questions I ask is, ‘Who’s interested in going to college?’—just trying to build them up and saying, it is a possibility, it’s not too late.”

Note: Some quotes have been edited for clarity and length. Quotes come from interviews conducted with Opportunity Culture educators over several years; titles for each educator here reflect the role the educator was in at the time of the interview.

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Discussion Questions

1. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **strengths** for you or your team?
2. Which actions in this element of instructional excellence are **weaknesses** for you or your team? Think about actions you never take, fail to take as often as needed, or do not take as well as needed to achieve strong learning growth consistently.
3. What one to three specific changes will you or your team make to **use your strengths more** often or more consistently and **improve weaknesses** in the coming months?
4. Make a brief **action plan** with specific goals, roles, and time by which you will make specific changes!
5. Did your changes produce **better learning results**? If so, keep them. If not, think again about what other changes to make!

For more elements of instructional leadership and excellence, visit the [Instructional Leadership and Excellence webpages](#), which each have **video clips** of teacher-leaders who have achieved high-growth student learning; **discussion questions** for developing your team and yourself; **training links** for ongoing professional development; and other **developmental resources** including books, videos, articles, and tools

For more on an Opportunity Culture, visit [OpportunityCulture.org](https://opportunityculture.org).

We’re happy to hear your feedback on this element; [contact us](#)!

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