

EDUCATION

Helping students set goals for the new year



CANYON VIEWS
ELIZABETH SCHAEFER

For many schools, the start of a new calendar year also means a new semester is right around the corner – both make this a good time of year for parents and teachers like me to work with children on setting goals.

Not only can this process help students reflect on their accomplishments in the past, but it can also help establish goals for the future.

To get an idea of my 6th graders academic goal-setting skills, I sent out a three-question survey just before the holiday break: Name one goal you would like to achieve for your school work in 2017? Why is this goal important to you? How do you plan to achieve that goal?

Here are a few responses from my students:

Luke said 1) "I want to become more efficient in all computer-based skills; keyboarding, Power Point, and Word." 2) "This provides the base to my future education and beyond." 3) "Continue to work hard...practicing these skills I learn in regular lessons. I will take my time...because I will not want to waste any time trying to relearn skills."

From Anna: 1) "In 2017 I would like to be better at math...to be better at dividing, be able to add small numbers quickly...and get 100-percent on all of my math tests." 2) "I want to feel better about doing math because when I do math I get really frustrated...I want to feel happy and proud of myself after getting 100-percent on assessments." 3) "I want to achieve this goal by studying really hard...and if I make extra time to practice these things I can achieve my goal."

Finally, feedback from Kimberly: 1) "My goal is to become a better typist and improve my grades." 2) "I want to get a good report card and I also want to go to college and get a degree." 3) "Study hard

and ask questions."

While my students have a variety of aspirations they would like to work towards, many children don't know where to start when it comes to setting goals. Parents can help by taking some time to brainstorm with their students, to help them identify a few skills they want to improve or to empower them to choose a topic they would enjoy learning more about.

Bestselling business author Harvey Mackay once said, "A goal is a dream with a plan and a deadline." One of the greatest benefits of setting goals is teaching students to take ownership of their learning. When they are given an opportunity to set their own goal and then achieve it, they gain a sense of self-esteem and pride.

When talking about the plan for students to achieve their dreams, I often refer to what are called SMART goals. These types of goals came from the business community, but also assist educators in helping students develop better, more focused goals. The SMART acronym has been modified over the years, but usually stands for goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely.

Specific: Students who narrow down their goals to specific accomplishments have a better chance for success than when trying to accomplish broader, more general goals. For example, this time of year many people make New Year's Resolutions. Notice the word "resolutions" contains the word "solution"? If a student makes a list of specific "solutions", like turning in homework more often or creating a study group with peers, those solutions will help them to achieve a larger goal or resolution, such as doing better in school.

Measurable: It's difficult to know if a student is making progress toward their goals unless there are measurable steps along the way. Parents should talk with their

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children about an action plan for how the goal will be achieved, and the criteria to measure progress. If the goal is for a better grade in English, then the student's plan might include reading a chapter in their book each week or learning 10 new words every day.

Attainable: Also known as "achievable", having an attainable goal is an important concept in goal setting. Students should create goals that are a stretch for them to attain, but are also achievable if they follow the necessary steps to success. Parents can help students understand that improvement and goal attainment takes time. Progress, not perfection, is what counts when trying to reach goals and their hard work will pay off down the road.

Realistic: When looking at a specific goal, consider if this is a realistic goal for that particular student. Is the goal clearly defined? Getting an A in History sounds nice, but an A on a mid-term test is different than an A for the whole semester. Is the goal also aligned with the student's past performance? What if this student received a D in that class last quarter, and is now trying to bring their grade up to an A? This large jump in grade could be an unrealistic expectation, and when the student falls short they could feel like a failure. Creating a solid action plan with realistic goals and a set timeline for check-ins can help increase a student's chance for success.

Timely:

Each goal should have a time frame associated with it, and progress towards student goals should be trackable. One way to do both is by writing down SMART goals and setting deadlines on a white board, calendar or other central location. This way, parents and students alike can clearly see progress towards the goal.

These are just a few tips for the goal-setting process. Like many skills, setting goals requires practice, practice, and more practice. Parents should emphasize to students that achieving their goals takes perseverance and time.

Motivation can also be a challenge for students after the holiday break, and children can get easily frustrated if work on their new goals is off to a rocky start. When a student is discouraged or begins to procrastinate, parents should keep a positive attitude and compliment them for trying. Goal setting comes with rewards and responsibilities. Students should have clear expectations and celebrations for achievements, but consequences can also be helpful in promoting success.

Goal-setting provides a chance for parents and students to support each other's hopes and come together as a team. Going through the SMART goal steps can be a good exercise for all ages -- helping children learn skills they will use in the years ahead and giving adults a refresher course on how to achieve their own goals.

So here is the New Year's Resolution I put on my list: talking to my students about setting goals to improve their education. How about you, what's your New Year goal?

Elizabeth Schaefer of Salem is an Oregon Connections Academy sixth-grade teacher. She can be reached through OR-CA, www.OregonConnectionsAcademy.com, (800) 382-6010.

Alpaca 'farming' a perfect fit for former newsperson

DEE MOORE
MARION SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Meredith Kuhl has led an adventurous life. "I use to be in the news way back," Kuhl said.

She worked for MSNBC in New Jersey. After some soul searching she decided to re-evaluate her life and took to the roads to travel the country in an RV to trek across country and see America.

Her conclusion after four years on the road was that she did not want to return to the city and spend the rest of her life crammed in an office. She wanted to farm.

A friend in Colorado introduced her to alpaca farming for fiber and it was a perfect fit.

After spending time learning how to raise and care for alpacas, she started Springtime Farms. She moved to Salem six years ago with her herd to be closer to "Mr. Wonderful."

She now spends her days working on

her farm, selling fiber products through her online storefront, SnugglyToes.com, and working for the Willamette Valley Humane Society as their development coordinator.

"I have fiber everywhere pretty much all the time," Kuhl said, describing her home with a laugh. She spins, cards and processes her wool.

She began her association with conservation districts in Colorado.

"I worked with the one in Colorado a little bit," she said. But it was a Salem realtor who introduced her to Marion Soil & Water Conservation District.

"I would like to do as much as possible to leave the land the way I found it."

She has a seasonal creek that has been left wild and a native prairie area that she minimally maintains. Kuhl believes her farm would be a much different place if she hadn't gotten to know the conservationists and been made aware of technical resources.

"I'm just tickled pink," she said of the



SPECIAL TO THE STAYTON MAIL

Meredith Kuhl enjoys raising alpacas in the East Willamette Valley.

district cooperater of the year award. "It's a bit of a surprise. I am really honored."

Dee Moore is a communications spe-

cialist with the Marion Soil & Water Conservation District. She can be reached at (503) 391-9927 ext. 306 or dee.moore@marionswcd.net.

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