

Winter 2015

An Examination of District Goals Across Cultures

Brad J. Gasser

The University Of Akron, bjg51@zips.uakron.edu

Please take a moment to share how this work helps you [through this survey](#). Your feedback will be important as we plan further development of our repository.

Follow this and additional works at: http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects



Part of the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gasser, Brad J., "An Examination of District Goals Across Cultures" (2015). *Honors Research Projects*. 191.
http://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/honors_research_projects/191

This Honors Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by The Dr. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College at IdeaExchange@UAkron, the institutional repository of The University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, USA. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Research Projects by an authorized administrator of IdeaExchange@UAkron. For more information, please contact mjon@uakron.edu, uapress@uakron.edu.

[An Examination of District Goals Across Cultures]

[Brad Jacob Gasser]

Department of [Education]

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

Approved:

Wameed Foster Date 5/1/15
Honors Project Sponsor (signed)

Wameed Foster
Honors Project Sponsor (printed)

Gary Holliday Date 5/9/15
Reader (signed)

Gary Holliday
Reader (printed)

Denise H. Stuart Date 4-24-15
Reader (signed)

Denise H. Stuart
Reader (printed)

Accepted:

[Signature] Date 5-4-15
Department Head (signed)

PEGGY L. MCCANN
Department Head (printed)

Denise H. Stuart Date 4-24-15
Honors Faculty Advisor (signed)

Denise H. Stuart
Honors Faculty Advisor (printed)

Date _____
Dean, Honors College

An Examination of District Goals Across Cultures

Brad Jacob Gasser

University of Akron

Abstract

School districts strive for success for their students. Success can be measured in a variety of ways, such as school projects and test scores. However, the most accurate way to define success would be through the accomplishment of a specific goal. This study explores the nature of goals across three Ohio school districts, as well as a school in the Dominican Republic. The methodologies of the project were to interview one administrator and two teachers from each of the school districts, and then observe each of the teachers that were interviewed. After the interviews and observations were conducted and examined, an analysis of the results occurred. The nature of how school districts create, implement, and accomplish goals are similar, but yet very different from each other. This is because no two schools are alike, as they differ in such factors among others such as student population, geographic location, and level of poverty.

Introduction

There are many essential components that need to work together in order to create a successful school system. One such component is the creation and implementation of district goals. District goals are skills and benchmarks in which schools strive to have their students achieve and master (Newman, 2012). Goals are often created by various offices of leadership within school districts. They need to be clear and understandable for all students and teachers. Goals also need to be clear for parents, so that they understand the academic benchmarks set for their children. By understanding these benchmarks, parents are likely to become more engaged in their children's learning. Setting goals is crucial, as they provide a roadmap in how to meet the needs of each and every individual child. They can also be used to guide teachers in finding and developing the best possible methods and practices to teach their students. Goal setting also creates a culture in which teachers as a body take responsibility for all students. When teachers

have to work together in order to help their students succeed, it allows them to take even more ownership and focus on the specific needs of each individual student. Ultimately, district goals are set so that administrators, teacher, students, parents, and the community know what is trying to be achieved and that the path to success is made explicitly clear (Newman, 2012).

This study outlines the nature of district goals across four very different school districts. As outlined by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), school districts throughout the state are assigned to a specific typology classification. Classifications of school districts are made in order to provide a “consistent way to stratify districts for research purposes” (ODE, 2015 g, p. 1). The classifications are created based off of two main characteristics: geographic and demographic. According to the ODE (2015 g), there are four main typology designations for school districts. They are rural, small town, suburban, and urban. Within the four main designations, each one is split into two groupings, based off of student poverty and population. Thus, there are a total of eight possible designations, or codes, that school districts could fall under. The following consists of the eight codes, as described by the ODE (2015 g). Code 1 is rural, with high student poverty and small student population. Code 2 is rural, with average student poverty and very small student population. Code 3 is small town, with low student poverty and small student population. Code 4 is small town, with high student poverty and average student population size. Code 5 is suburban, with low student poverty and average student population size. Code 6 is suburban, with very low student poverty and large student population size. Code 7 is urban, with high student poverty and average student population. Code 8 is urban, with very high student poverty and very large student population (ODE, 2015 g).

The three schools in Ohio that have been chosen for this study are all given different

typology codes from one another. Norwayne Middle School is a Code 3, which means it is small town, with low student poverty and small student population (ODE, 2015 g). Barberton High School is a Code 7, which means it is urban, with high student poverty and average student population. East Community Learning Center is at a Code 8, which means it is urban, with very high student poverty and a very large student population (ODE, 2015 g).

The motive of the study was to determine and analyze how schools that differ from each other in typology classification codes compare in approaching, implementing, and achieving goals. For example, do all these schools approach goals the same way? Do all these schools have the same needs? Does a code 3 school have the same types of goals as a code 8 school? Which types of schools achieve which types of goals? How do Ohio schools compare with a Dominican Republican school system relating to the approach, implementation, and achievement of goals?

Backgrounds on the Four School Districts

This section of report will consist of information taken from the State Report Cards from the 2013-2014 school year on the three schools in Ohio that were chosen for this study.

Information on the specific school building that the study was completed in, as well as the district as a whole, will be included. The demographics, graduation rate, and preparedness for success, and state report card grades will all be included. There will also be information on El Seibo Education Center, the school system in the Dominican Republic that was used in this study.

The state report cards for the 2013-2014 school year consist of several main areas in which grades are given to each school, depending on how well the school has done in those areas. The main areas are Achievement, Gap closing, K-3 Literacy (will not be discussed in this

report), Progress, Graduation Rate, and Prepared for Success (ODE, 2015 e). Achievement is divided into two areas, performance index and indicators met. The Performance Index measures the test results of every student, not just those who score proficient or higher. There are six levels on the index and districts receive points for every student in each of these levels. The higher the achievement level, the more the points awarded in the district's index. This rewards schools and districts for improving performance. Indicators Met measures the percent of students who have passed state tests. Test results are reported for each student in a grade and subject. At least 80 percent of students must pass to get credit for the indicator. Gap closing shows how well students are succeeding in math, reading, and graduation, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or disability. Gap closings are measured by Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) which compare the performance of student groups in these areas with a state goal. Progress measures the students' progress in math and reading in grades 4-8 for overall, gifted students, students in the lowest 20% achievement, and students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 e). In the following section, these report card grades will be discussed for each of the schools that were chosen for this study.

Norwayne Middle School

Norwayne Middle School houses grades 5-8 and is located within the Norwayne Local School District; both of which reside in Wayne County, Ohio. The following information was taken from the State Report Cards during the 2013-2014 school year. Norwayne Middle School has a daily enrollment of 352 students, who identify as 95.3% White, non-Hispanic and 3.0% Multiracial (ODE, 2015 f). The Norwayne Local School District has a daily enrollment of 1,356 students, who identify as 95.5% White, non-Hispanic and 3.2% Multiracial (ODE, 2015 e). The overall data gathered from the report cards shows that the district as a whole is not very diverse

concerning race. According to the state report cards, the area is not deeply affected by poverty, as only 35.6% of students at Norwayne Middle School and 32.1% of students in the entire district identify as economically disadvantaged (ODE, 2015 e/f). It is inferred that special education services are necessary, as 12.5% of students at Norwayne Middle School and 13.3% of students in the entire district identify as having learning disabilities (ODE, 2015 e/f). The attendance rate of students at Norwayne Middle School is 96.0%, and is 95.5% for the entire district (ODE, 2015 e/f). At a four-year rate, the graduation rate of the Norwayne Local School District was higher than the state average, as the rate was 94.4% and the state rate was 82.2% (ODE, 2015 e). The graduating class of 2013 of the Norwayne Local School District seems to be prepared for success, as 63.6% have taken the ACT, 1.9% have taken the SAT, 7.5% have received an Honors Diploma, 15.9% have received industry-recognized credentials, and 12.1% have received dual-enrollment credit (ODE, 2015 e).

The state report card grades for Norwayne Middle School and the Norwayne Local School District are as follows. Achievement is divided into Performance Index and State Indicators scores. Norwayne Middle School scored a 91.3% (A) on Performance Index, and the Norwayne Local School district scored an 89.3% (B) (ODE, 2015 e/f). For State Indicators met, Norwayne Middle School met 7/7 (100%) indicators, ranging from grades 5-8 scores in reading, math, and science (ODE, 2015 f). The district met 24/24 state indicators (100%), ranging from grades 3-8 scores in reading, math, and science, as well as grades 10-11 OGT scores (ODE, 2015 e). For gap closing, which is measured by Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs), Norwayne Middle School received 76.6% (C) (ODE, 2015 f). This grade was received as the groups of white students, all students, and economically disadvantaged students all scored above the state AMO for reading and math, but students with disabilities did not. The entire district received

80.0% (B) (ODE, 2015 e). This grade was received as the groups of white students, all students, and economically disadvantaged students all scored above the state AMO for reading and math, but students with disabilities did not. The progress scores for Norwayne Middle School are as follows: an overall grade of A (math and reading, grades 4-8), a grade of C for gifted students (students identified as gifted in reading, math, and/or superior cognitive ability), a grade of C for students in the lowest 20% of achievement (reading and math achievement), and a grade of a B for students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 f). The entire district had grades of A for overall, a grade of B for gifted students, grade of C for students in the lowest 20% of achievement, and a grade of A for students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 e).

Barberton High School

Barberton High School houses grades 9-12 and is located within the Barberton City School District; both of which reside in Summit County, Ohio. The following information was taken from the State Report Cards during the 2013-2014 school year. Barberton High School has a daily student enrollment of 1,129 students, who identify as 80.6% White, non-Hispanic, 13.2% Black, non-Hispanic, 4.0% Multiracial, and 1.3% Hispanic (ODE, 2015 c). The Barberton City School District has a daily enrollment of 3,736 students, who identify as 80.5% White, non-Hispanic, 11.6% Black, non-Hispanic, 5.5% Multiracial, 1.6% Hispanic, 0.5% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 0.3% American Indian/ Alaskan Native (ODE, 2015 b). The overall data gathered from the report cards shows that the district as a whole is not very diverse concerning race, as the majority of the students are White, non-Hispanic. According to the state report cards, the area is high in poverty, as 62.9% of students at Barberton High School and 71.0% of students in the entire district identify as economically disadvantaged (ODE, 2013 b/c). It is inferred that special education services are necessary, as 16.2% of students at Barberton High School and

18.1% of students in the entire district identify as having learning disabilities (ODE, 2015 b/c). The attendance rate of students at Barberton High School is 91.5%, and is 93.3% for the entire district (ODE, 2015 b/c). At a four-year rate, the graduation rate of the Barberton City School District was higher than the state average, as the rate was 83.0% and the state rate was 82.2% (ODE, 2015 e). The graduating class of 2013 of the Barberton City School District seems to be prepared for success, as 62.6% have taken the ACT, 2.8% have taken the SAT, 19.1% have received an Honors Diploma, 10.4% have received industry-recognized credentials, and 14.6% have received dual-enrollment credit (ODE, 2015 b).

The state report card grades for Barberton High School and the Barberton City School District are as follows. Achievement is divided into Performance Index and State Indicators scores. Barberton High School scored a 78.5% (C) on Performance Index, and the Barberton City School district scored a 75.7% (C) (ODE, 2015 b/c). For State Indicators met, Barberton High School met 8/10 (80%) indicators, including scores from 10th and 11th grade OGT scores. The indicators not met were science and social studies OGT scores (ODE, 2015 c). The district met 11/24 state indicators (45.8%), ranging from grades 3-8 scores in reading, math, and science, as well as grades 10-11 OGT scores. The indicators not met were 3rd grade math, 4th grade math, 5th grade reading, math, and science, 6th grade math and reading, 7th grade math and reading, 8th grade math and science, and 10th and 11th grade OGT scores in science and social studies (ODE, 2015 b). For gap closing, which is measured by Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs), Barberton High School received 50.0% (F) (ODE, 2015 c). This grade was received as the groups of white students, all students, and African American students all scored above the state AMO for reading, but students with disabilities and economically disadvantaged students did not. White students and all students scored above the state AMO for math, but African

American, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students did not (ODE, 2015 c). The entire district received 16.7% (F) (ODE, 2015 b). This grade was received as the groups of white students, all students, economically disadvantaged students, multiracial students, African American students, and students with disabilities all scored below the state AMO for reading and math (ODE, 2015 b). The progress scores for Barberton High School were not available (ODE, 2015 c). The entire district had grades of A for overall (math and reading, grades 4-8), a grade of C for gifted students (students identified as gifted in reading, math, and/or superior cognitive ability), grade of C for students in the lowest 20% of achievement (reading and math achievement), and a grade of C for students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 b).

East Community Learning Center

East Community Learning Center houses grades 7-12 and is located within the Akron City School District; both of which reside in Summit County, Ohio. The following information was taken from the State Report Cards during the 2013-2014 school year. East Community Learning Center has a daily student enrollment of 1,065 students, who identify as 62.0% Black, non-Hispanic, 24.9% White, non-Hispanic, 8.3% Multiracial, 3.3% Hispanic, and 1.5% Asian or Pacific Islander (ODE, 2015 d). The Akron City School District has a daily enrollment of 21,265 students, who identify as 45.5% Black, non-Hispanic, 38.0 White, non-Hispanic, 7.4% Multiracial, 5.5% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.5% Hispanic, and 0.1% American Indian/ Alaskan Native (ODE, 2015 a). The overall data gathered from the report cards shows that the district as a whole is very diverse concerning race. According to the state report cards, the area is high in poverty, as 100% of students at both East Community Learning Center and students in the entire district identify as economically disadvantaged (ODE, 2013 a/d). It is inferred that special education services are necessary, as 22.9% of students at East Community Learning Center and

18.9% of students in the entire district identify as having learning disabilities (ODE, 2015 a/d). The attendance rate of students at East Community Learning Center is 91.5%, and is 93.8% for the entire district (ODE, 2015 a/d). At a four-year rate, the graduation rates of both East Community Learning Center and the Akron City School District were lower than the state average. The rate at East Community Learning Center was 70.4%, the rate of the Akron City School District was 78.4%, and the state rate was 82.2% (ODE, 2015 a/d). The graduating class of 2013 of East Community Learning Center seems to be somewhat prepared for success, as 84.9% have taken the ACT and 6.1% have received industry-recognized credentials. 0% of students have received Dual Enrollment Credit, and 0% have received an Honors Diploma (ODE, 2015 d). The graduating class of 2013 of the Akron City School District seems to be prepared for success, as 88.3% of students have taken the ACT, 2.7% have taken the SAT, 4.2% have received an Honors Diploma, 6.3% have received industry-recognized credentials, 2.5% have received dual enrollment credit, and 1.2% have been a part of the International Baccalaureate program (ODE, 2015 a).

The state report card grades for East Community Learning Center and the Akron City School District are as follows. Achievement is divided into Performance Index and State Indicators scores. East Community Learning Center scored a 64.9% (D) on Performance Index, and the Akron City School District scored a 69.6% (D) (ODE, 2015 a/d). For State Indicators met, East Community Learning Center met 1/15 (6.7%) indicators, which ranged from grades 5-8 scores in reading, math, and science. The only indicator that was passed was OGT reading scores for 11th grade (ODE, 2015 d). The district met 2/24 state indicators (8.3%), ranging from grades 3-8 scores in reading, math, and science, as well as grades 10-11 OGT scores. The only two indicators that passed was OGT reading and writing scores for 11th grade (ODE, 2015 a).

For gap closing, which is measured by Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs), East Community Learning Center received 3.8% (F) (ODE, 2015 d). This grade was received as the groups of white students, all students, economically disadvantaged students, African American students, multiracial students, and students with disabilities all scored below the state AMO for reading and math (ODE, 2015 d). The entire district received 24.6% (F) (ODE, 2015 a). This grade was received as the groups of white students, multiracial students, all students, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, African American students, Asian/Pacific Islander students, and students with disabilities all scored below the state AMO for reading and math (ODE, 2015 a) The progress scores for East Community Learning Center are as follows: an overall grade of A (math and reading, grades 4-8), a grade of D for gifted students (students identified as gifted in reading, math, and/or superior cognitive ability), a grade of C for students in the lowest 20% of achievement (reading and math achievement), and a grade of a D for students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 d). The entire district had grades of F for overall, a grade of C for gifted students, grade of A for students in the lowest 20% of achievement, and a grade of D for students with disabilities (ODE, 2015 a).

El Seibo Education Center

El Seibo Education Center lies within the city of El Seibo. The school houses primary grades through the eighth grade. There are approximately 745 students in the school. Most of the students who attend El Seibo Education Center live in the city of El Seibo, but a few come from outside city limits. According to the vice principal of the school, the average income of families is about \$100 US dollars per month. The Dominican Republic is composed of many towns and cities, in which the people living in them have some opportunity for education and work. The country also has small communities called *bateys* that are very common throughout.

Bateys are small Haitian communities (Esperanza International, 2015). The Haitians living in the *bateys* are essentially people who have come from Haiti to the Dominican in hopes of living a better life. However, the ones who hold jobs typically work long hard hours in the sugarcane fields, where they barely make enough money to survive. The *bateys* are very dirty and poor, and the majority of the people living in them cannot read or write. Therefore, it is extremely important that citizens of the country get educated, so that they are able to get have the essential skills needed to get, hold, and be productive at a job.

The Conduction of the Study

After the four school districts were chosen, a process was made so that information and research could be obtained in an orderly manner. Two sets of interview questions were created; one set for administrators and the other set for teachers. One administrator and two teachers from each district were to be interviewed using the appropriate set of interview questions. The process of the interviews was diverse, as some of the interviews were completed via e-mail and some were completed face-to-face. After the interviews were conducted, each teacher was to be observed at least once. Observations of the interviewed teachers were deemed to be necessary, so that connections could be made between the interviews and the classroom experience.

The Administrator Interview was separated into two distinct sections. The first section consisted of general district information, and the second section consisted of questions relating to the district goals. The first set of questions which relate to general district information are listed below:

1. How many students are enrolled in the district?
2. What is the average annual income of the families in your district?
3. What is the average number of children in families in your district?

4. What is the attendance rate of students in your district?
5. What is the graduation rate of your school?
6. What is the starting annual income of a first year teacher in your district?

The second set of questions, which relate to the district goals, are listed below. The last two questions (6 and 7) are especially important, as this is where results due to the implementation of the goals will be recorded.

1. What are your district's goals for the academic year?
2. How were these goals decided? Did you base them off of needs of students, in competencies of teachers, or governmental regulations?
3. How were the goals communicated to the teaching staff?
4. How well do the teachers understand and implement the goals in your opinion?
5. How do you monitor the teachers and their implementation of the goals? Are there consequences for teachers not observing/following district goals?
6. Since implementing these goals, have you observed a change in teacher performance in your district?
7. Since implementing these goals, have you observed a change in student performance in your district?

The Teacher Interview questions were organized in one distinct section, focusing on the district goals. The last two questions (6 and 7) are especially important, as this is where results due to the implementation of the goals will be recorded. The questions are as follows:

1. What are your district's goals for the academic year?
2. How were the goals communicated with you?

3. Do you support the district's goals? Do you find them valuable?
4. How well do you feel you implement the goals? Do you feel you have altered your instruction to complete district goals?
5. If you do not support the goals, what do you think would be a better/more valuable goal(s)?
6. Since implementing the goals, have you observed a change in your students' academic performance?
7. Since implementing the goals, have you observed a change in your students' classroom performance?

The Responses to the Interviews

Norwayne Middle School

The administrator from Norwayne Middle School who I interviewed was the head principal. There were six main goals for the academic year. They were to (1) meet or exceed all of the state's AMO goals on the 2014-2015 report card, (2) review curriculum maps aligned to the Common Core Standards/State Standards, (3) ensure that assessments are aligned to the Common Core Standards, reflect state testing methods, and include technology applications, (4) focus on the unique qualities of each child by using the results of assessments to design and amend instruction to meet the needs of individual students, (5) continue to upgrade technology and training, and (6) explore various options to utilize technology for student enrichment and staff development. These goals were decided from a Continuous Improvement Committee, which is comprised of administrators and teaching staff from each building in the district. The goals are decided as the committee takes into account areas of strength, weakness, and data that

is present. After the goals are decided, they are then published, put online, and released to the public. The goals were communicated to the teaching staff by giving each staff member a booklet containing the goals, and then further covering them in staff meetings or district in-service meetings. The principal felt that the teachers understand and implement the goals very well, as the district has been given a rating of “Excellent” for the past 11 years. He expressed that standards are set extremely high in order to maintain the streak. Monitoring teachers has been made easier, as each year he receives reports on the staff for measures of student growth, which is a part of the teacher evaluations. Each teacher is reviewed by these evaluations at their evaluation conferences. If a teacher is not “up to par”, then an improvement plan is written for that teacher. The principal noted that since the goals have been implemented, he has noticed a positive improvement in his staff. Due to state testing switching to an online format, the staff has done a great job using computer based lessons and the district as a whole in increasing technology. This is most likely a result from using professional development time to keep staff updated with technology. He also noted that since the goals have been implemented, he has seen progress in his students. He said that students were at first unfamiliar with the new state testing methods, and struggled. However, results have been getting better, and similar assessment experiences have been incorporated into classroom instruction. More practice time has also been given on computers.

The two teachers that were interviewed were a grade 8 Language Arts teacher and a grades 6-8 computer teacher. Both teachers knew the six district goals. The communication of the goals to them was through the booklet that was distributed to them at the beginning of the year. In-service days were also used, as each teacher would discuss how he or she could individualize the district goals to his or her specific class. One teacher mentioned the mentoring

program, which involves more experienced teachers helping younger teachers find answers on how to implement the goals better. Both teachers supported the goals, and felt that by working towards a common goal together, so much more can be accomplished. From the observations, both teachers presented the learning targets for the day to their students. The computer teacher did mention that the district goals are not always at the forefront of his thinking every day, but he still finds ways to implement them. Since he taught computers, he found many unique ways for his students to learn about technology. For example, from the observations, he had his students create newsletters, use time lapse cameras, create highlight videos, and complete electrical circuits with Arduino materials. Both teachers felt that they have altered their instruction in order to implement the goals successfully. The academic performance of students has increased according to both teachers. The language arts teacher has noticed her students are becoming better close readers by being able to compare two passages of text side by side on a computer. From the observations, she was able to implement technology into her lessons, as she used it in the form of *Jeopardy* to teach vocabulary. She also has noticed her students have become better at taking the computer-based tests, as she has modeled hers after the PARCC. Classroom performance has also increased, as performance scores of students has raised.

Barberton High School

The administrator from Barberton High School that I interviewed was the assistant principal. There were four main goals for the Barberton district that he shared with me. They were (1) to prepare students to enter college and career fields, (2) ensure that all students pass the required tests for graduation, (3) follow the ACES writing model, which is implemented in grades 5-12, and (4) building on the Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS). ACES stands for (1) Answering the question by restating the question, (2) Cite 2 pieces of evidence

(quotes) from the text, (3) Explain how your quotes support your answer, and (4) Summary or connection sentence. The PBIS system involves each of the buildings in the district putting a heavy emphasis on positive behavior and tailoring it to the students. For example, elementary school students created videos on how to and how not to act in a variety of situations, and the students at the high school are given “magic dollars” for good deeds and are able to spend the money on spirit wear items. The goals were decided off of some legislation that the district had to abide by, as well as for the specific needs of the students. Specific focus was placed on promoting college-readiness for minority students and first year college generation college students. The goals were communicated to the teaching staff through staff meetings, professional development time once a month, and e-mail. According to the assistant principal, the teachers understand and do their best to implement the goals to the best of their ability. He said that the teachers have to buy into it in order for the students to. The only goal that the assistant principal elaborated on that he could monitor teachers with was the PBIS, as there are specific guidelines to follow and positive referrals. For teachers that did not follow district goals, there is no specific penalty, but individual meetings with teachers are scheduled as needed. The principal noted that since the goals have been implemented, he has noticed a positive improvement in his staff. He said that teachers are still teaching just as well as they have been, teaching is consistent, the overall school climate has improved, and that the teachers simply want what is best for the students. Since the goals have been implemented, he has also noticed a positive change in the students, as the overall culture has improved. With a better culture, student behavior is improved, which leads to an improved classroom experience and higher achievement.

The two teachers that were interviewed were a grade 10 English teacher and a grade 10

social studies teacher. Both teachers mentioned the ACES writing model and the PBIS. From the observations, both teachers had posters of the ACES writing model displayed, and the social studies teacher guided his students through the model for one of his writing assignments. The social studies teacher mentioned improving test taking abilities for the new state mandated testing. Both teachers said that the goals were communicated to them through teacher meetings and e-mails. Both mentioned “magic week”, which occurs one week per month and involves teachers working together to discuss ways in how to better achieve the goals each day. In return, students only have half-day classes all week. The district goals were supported by both teachers. The English teacher added that to further the PBIS, she recognizes students who do exceptionally well by having a student of the week and sending home weekly positive postcards. Both teachers felt that they implemented the goals well. The English teacher stated that the PBIS has not altered her instruction, but that the ACES writing model has. She in fact had to spend the first nine weeks teaching the model, and currently has to report her students writing scores using the ACES monthly. Both teachers supported the goals. Since implementing the goals, both teachers have observed a change in students’ academic performance, especially with the ACES writing model. Student behavior has somewhat improved, as both teachers noted the use of the “magic dollar” has cause pros and cons. The pros are that some students do take advantage of the dollar and go out of their way to do nice things. However, many students feel entitled and expect a magic dollar whenever they do anything remotely good.

East Community Learning Center

The administrator from East Community Learning Center that I interviewed was the assistant principal. The goals that he shared with me were (1) to pass OAA and PARCC state tests, (2) pass the OGT state test, (3) follow “non-negotiables” such as no more than 30 students

in a class, following IEPs closely, etc. and (4) each student taking four years of each core subject, rather than just three. The goals were mainly decided by government regulation, teachers unions, and administration. The goals were communicated to the teaching staff at a meeting prior to the start of the school year. He felt that the teachers understand the goals fairly well. Teachers are monitored on their implementation of the goals through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Through the PLCs, teachers have checklists that they have to complete and turn into administration. If it shows up on the checklists that a lot of students are not doing well, then the teachers have to come up with new strategies in order to help improve student progress. If the scores do not improve, then teachers are written up and held accountable. Since the implementation of the goals, the assistant principal has not noticed a huge change in teacher performance. He mentioned that the teachers who go above and beyond will see an increase in their students' scores, while the teachers who do not see a decrease. He did not notice any change in student performance with the implementation of the district goals.

The two teachers that were interviewed were a grade 7 science teacher and a grade 7 math teacher. The teachers mentioned the same goals as the assistant principal, but added a few more. They added (1) to ensure high quality teaching and learning, (2) develop and maintain high performing staff, (3) build relationships with students, staff, family, and community, (4) close the achievement gap, and (5) use formative assessment in class. The goals were communicated to the teachers by the School Improvement Team at the beginning of the year at a staff meeting, as well as through e-mail. One teacher claimed that the goals were valuable, while the other teacher felt that better goals could be implemented that more effectively meet the needs of the students. She suggested that students should be taught life skills and character education. She further said that putting a constant focus on testing does not give students the opportunity

focus on skills they will need as adults. Both teachers felt that they implement the district goals fairly well. The math teacher said that her focus is on high quality teaching and learning, and that the math department meets regularly to examine student data, and determine the best ways to teach the students. The science teacher mentioned that she uses formative assessment with each unit, and that it gives her feedback on how well the students understand the concepts covered in class. From the observations, both teachers at East have a routine of physically writing the goals for the day on the whiteboard for all of their students to see. Since the implementation of the goals, the teachers have seen a gradual change in students' academic performance. The math teacher said that previously, she would move through curriculum whether students go the concepts or not, and she would just try to fill in the gaps later. Now the focus is analyzing student work deeper, give more formative assessments, and not move on until the students understand the material. The science teacher stated that the students who have the desire will improve. The overall classroom performance has also gradually improved with the implementation of the goals. The math teacher said that many students start the year way below grade level, but are gradually improving when taught math fundamentals. The science teacher commented that her students do see their need to understand the material being taught in class. As seen from the observations, she tailored her lessons to the specific needs of her students so that they would be more likely to want to learn the material.

El Seibo Education Center

The administrator from El Seibo Education Center that was interviewed was the vice principal of the school. The district goals were to (1) prepare students in reading, writing, and math so that they can find a good job in their future, (2) grant students a certificate, which proves that they finished school, (3) be able to have good communication skills, (4) be prepared for any

situation at any time in their futures, and (5) teach students how to be humble, friendly, and respectful of others. The district goals were decided prior to the start of the school year, as teachers met and selected goals based on the needs of students in the community of El Seibo. The goals were communicated to the teaching staff by meeting together at the beginning of the year. They then typically meet in the middle of the year and discuss which goals to keep and which ones to discard. The vice principal spoke very highly of the teachers implementing the goals, as they work as a team to make the goals work for their students. There were a variety of ways in which teachers were monitored with their implementation of the goals. Teachers work with supervisors, are in continuous training, and student work is checked to see if they are truly getting the material. Once a month, there is one full day of training for teachers. If a teacher is struggling, a conference is held with that teacher, and new ideas on how to implement the goals are formulated. Since the implementation of the goals, the vice principal has observed a positive change in the teaching staff. The teachers are enthusiastic on implementing the objectives and working with the children, and that the teachers are motivated by shaping the whole child. The teachers are not motivated by money, as they had all come from where the students are currently, and truly want what is best for the students. Since implementing the goals, student performance has been increased. Students know that they are being prepared for their future and are enthusiastic about becoming something. They sincerely want to show their teachers that they are capable of reaching the goals that are set for them.

The two teachers that were interviewed were the grades 5-6 math teacher and the building art teacher. Both teachers stated the goals that the vice principal had previously said. The goals were communicated to them at the beginning of the school year as a team. Both teachers supported the district goals, as they could see a positive change in both students and teachers.

The teachers felt that they implement the goals fairly well, but not as well as they could due to a lack of resources. Both teachers mentioned that they do not have a direct access to technology, and that students do not get the practice they need with computer skills. This forces students to have to complete various assignments elsewhere, such as coffee shops. Since the implementation of the goals, both teachers noticed an increase in students' academic work. The students often get very motivated and competitive. They also have desires and dreams to be successful, which motivates them to perform well academically. Students' classroom behavior has also improved, given the diverse backgrounds from which the students come from. The teachers stated that roughly 85% of the students behave fairly well.

Analysis

The creation of the district goals varied amongst the four school districts examined in this study. Each school took a slightly different approach. Akron City Schools based all of their goals specifically from state regulations, while the other three districts took into account the specific needs of the students. Of those three schools, each one also had a slightly different way in who decided the goals. A group of administrators met and decided the goals for Barberton. For Norwayne, a Continuous Improvement Team was comprised, which included administrators and a wide variety of teachers from each of the schools in the district. One of the goals that they decided was essential was to meet and succeed all AMOs that the state set. According to the state report cards, the district did meet this goal. In El Seibo, administrators and teachers also united to determine the goals. According to Newman (2012), goals need to be set specifically to the teaching and learning of the students. Essentially, the accomplishment of the goals should meet the needs of all the students. Goals should focus on what students need to improve, as well as explain why the particular skill needs to be improved (Newman, 2012).

The communication of the district goals in all four school districts seemed to be a priority, especially to the staff. Glen Thomas, an executive director of the California County Superintendents Educational Service Association (2005), stated that integrity and open communication are vital for success in education. Each school district had a variety of methods in communicating the goals to the staff. The most common method was an all-staff meeting prior to the beginning of the school year, where the goals would be discussed. This seems to make the most sense, as if the staff knows prior to the academic year even starting what they are expected to do, then they are better able to focus their lesson and unit plans in ways that are aimed to achieve the goals. Another method used to communicate the goals to the staff in one of the districts were to have one day set aside in which teachers could take part in professional development meetings. In the Norwayne Local School District, booklets were created by a Continuous Improvement Plan team and distributed to all staff in the district. This school district was the only one in this study that used this method as a means of communicating the goals, but it proved to be an excellent method, as this was the only school district in which the teachers interviewed were able to match the administrator word for word on what the district goals even were. Creating opportunities for teachers to have readily access to the goals at their fingertips is essential if administrators desire their staff to reference and reflect what exactly they should be striving for. All four districts used means of e-mail to communicate goals to staff. One aspect that I noticed was not addressed by any of the school districts was the communication of the district goals to parents. It is necessary that parents are informed of district goals, as their knowledge of the goals can provide them with the motivation to scaffold school-based activities for their children (Bigelow & Zhou, 2011). It also will allow them in turn to motivate their children to push themselves and succeed in school (Bigelow & Zhou, 2011). This could be done

through means of letters sent home, meetings with parents, open houses, etc.

All of the teachers interviewed felt that they have implemented the district goals fairly well. As one Barberton teacher said, there are “things we could do better”. All of the teachers made comments on how they implement the goals. One Norwayne teacher claimed that he was always changing and tweaking his instruction to not only meet the goals, but to best meet the needs of his students. Another Norwayne teacher felt that she was already addressing the goals, but she does make adjustments accordingly. The Barberton teachers emphasized experimentation and using trial and error to see how they can best fulfill the goals, especially the ACES writing model. The Akron teachers mentioned that they do make and adjustments to their teaching and strive to fulfill the goals to the best of their ability. The teachers of El Seibo said that despite their lack of resources, such as technology, they also alter instruction to meet the needs of each of their students. Another key way that can aid teachers in meeting the needs of their students is to commit to ongoing professional development including a focus on specific teaching and learning issues (Feiler, 2000).

The achievement of the district goals for each district varies. Norwayne, a code 3 school, appeared to meet or at least be on its way at meeting most of its academic goals. Norwayne has met all of the AMOs set by the state, and has modeled assessment based off of the new state testing methods. Use of technology is implemented in all of the classrooms, including for student projects and testing. Barberton, a code 7 school, appeared to be working productively towards the achievement of its goals. The PBIS plan was being implemented by staff, and it has been reported to increase student behavior in school. The ACES writing model has also been implemented, and although it started out rough, the quality of writing of the students has increased. According to the state report cards, Barberton High School students do appear to be

prepared for success, as very high percentage of students have taken college-readiness tests and have been in programs in preparing them for either college or a career field. Also according to the state report cards, Barberton is not passing the science and social studies OGT tests. East Community Learning Center, a code 8 school, appeared to not be meeting its goals, but eventually could with some added intervention and work. The school's only measureable goals were to pass the state mandated tests, and according to the state report cards, the tests are not being passed. According to the state report cards, the school received nearly all Ds and Fs in those categories. Some of the teachers in the district felt that the goals did not help the students very much. Rather, suggestions on deriving goals that will develop the whole student were more in favor, such as life skills and character education.

Technology was a topic discussed in both the Norwayne Local School District and the El Seibo Education Center. Norwayne in fact had two goals related to technology. They were to upgrade the technology in the district and become more competent with it, as well as exploring various options to utilize the technology. El Seibo did not necessarily have any goals based around technology, but the staff did make it clear that because of the lack of technology in the district, it is hard to accomplish many things that they would like to do. In fact, only about 2.3% of families in the Dominican Republic have access to a computer (Esperanza International, 2015). It is difficult with so many people in the country not being computer-literate, as computer literacy skills allow for greater opportunity for people to become competitive in finding a job or sustaining a business (Esperanza International, 2015). As discovered, computers are serving to be very useful means to complete efficiently a very wide variety of tasks. A school in Columbus, Ohio implemented a technology plan, and in three years, they found that students' competency using computers increased, communication skills were improved, and they got a

better conception of a global community. (Kilbane, 1997). This plan met the needs of the students in the district, who were becoming socio-economically and culturally diverse, as well as students with learning disabilities (Kilbane, 1997). If computers and technology could be more widespread and taught to the people of the Dominican Republic, then the Dominican society could drastically move forward.

The most intriguing comparison that was made was how the overall nature of goals at El Seibo Education Center differed from the goals of the three other school districts that were examined in this study. Not once did any of the administrators or teachers mention anything about standardized testing or standards. The Dominican Republic does have a standardized testing system, and the tests do provide a way for standards to be met (Nordin, n.d.). However, there are major problems that exist in the Dominican testing system, such as the test creation, scoring, and in reporting grades (Nordin, n.d.). Therefore, the standardized tests did not seem to impact the nature of El Seibo's goals. EL Seibo's district goals were based on directly preparing students to be well-mannered, productive, and able to provide for themselves upon graduation. In this geographic region of the Dominican Republic, many people work hard physical jobs in the sugarcane fields. If people want to get good job, they have to be able to rise above their environment and push themselves towards success. Just being able to read and write puts them ahead, as nearly 15% of the population in the Dominican Republic and 35% of the population in the bateys cannot read or write (Esperanza International, 2015). Similar to the wishes of the Akron City School District teacher, the goals of El Seibo revolve around developing the whole student and enabling them to be well-mannered citizens. Good communication skills, as well as being friendly, humble, and respectful to others, were points that the staff at El Seibo Education Center stressed were essential for their student to take away from their education.

Conclusion

Goals are an essential component in any educational system. They provide the framework for success across a multitude of settings. It is important that each goal strives to measure a specific bar of excellency, and that they are both challenging and attainable. The processes in which district goals are created needs to be highly organized, and that the needs of the students are taken into consideration when deriving the goals. As learned from the study, communication of the goals is also a highly important piece, as students, teacher, parents, and the community should know what is trying to be achieved. The implementation of the goals, or putting them into practice, is crucial and can occur in a variety of ways. Each individual teacher has to focus on high quality teaching and learning, and typically may alter instruction in order to accomplish the goals. The achievements of goals are exciting and rewarding for students, teacher, and all involved. Not only is the end result of achieving the goal special, but what was learned along the journey is special also.

Not one school is just alike another school, as schools all have unique characteristics that set them apart from another. In terms of student enrollment, there are small schools, average schools, and large schools. Each school also differs in its geographic location, as well as its level of poverty. Based on the type of school it is, the creation, implementation, and achievement of the district goals can be very different from each other. This is true, as each school is unique and has diverse needs. Even though the various types of schools in the same country, and even the same state, can seem to be very diverse from one another, one should remember that there are schools in other countries that are even more diverse than our own. Schools in countries such as the Dominican Republic have completely different needs than schools in the United States. Thus, their goals and the motives of their goals will be somewhat different than the goals of school

districts in America. Without schools pursuing district goals, there would be no sure way of measuring the specific progress for that school. The nature of how the creation, implementation, and achievement of district goals across diverse types of school systems may vary, but the hope of moving forward and progressing across these schools is universal.

References

- Bigelow, B. J., & Zhou, R. M. (2001). Relational scaffolding of school motivation: developmental continuities in students' and parents' ratings of the importance of school goals. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 162(1), 75.
- Esperanza International. (2015). Education. Retrieved from <http://esperanza.org/home/our-work/education.html>
- Feiler, R. (2000). Teachers leading teachers. *Educational Leadership*, 57(7), 66
- Kilbane, C. R. (1997). Planting the seeds of success. *Technology Connection*, 3(9), 12.
- Newman, R. (2012). Goal setting to achieve results. *Leadership*, 41(3), 12-38.
- Nordin, V. (n.d.). Dominican Republic- summary. *State University.com*. Retrieved from <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/395/Dominican-Republic-SUMMARY.html>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015a). Report card for Akron City School District. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/DistrictReport.aspx?DistrictIRN=043489>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015b). Report card for Barberton City School District. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/District-Report.aspx?DistrictIRN=043539>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015c). Report card for Barberton High School. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/School-Report.aspx?SchoolIRN=001545>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015d). Report card for East Community Learning Center. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/School-Report.aspx?SchoolIRN=009498>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015e). Report card for Norwayne Local School District. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/District-Report.aspx?DistrictIRN=050567>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015f). Report card for Norwayne Middle School. Retrieved from <http://reportcard.education.ohio.gov/Pages/School-Report.aspx?SchoolIRN=007625>
- Ohio Department of Education. (2015g). Typology of Ohio School Districts. Retrieved from <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Typology-of-Ohio-School-Districts>
- Thomas, G. (2005). Persistent leadership. *Leadership*, 35(1), 8-9.