

## I-2: Convince students that they want academic success (“I Want”)

### Explicitly Discuss Learning Goals

In order to be fully invested students must believe that reaching their big goals will in fact positively impact their lives. The more students understand (at a meta-cognitive level) what they need to accomplish, the greater their investment will be in working to achieve their goals.

Teachers explicitly discuss learning goals to highlight the relevance of school work and the intrinsic value of classroom goals.

### Begin with a shared academic vision

Motivating academic destinations help students see what they will accomplish during the year. Articulate a clear, ambitious big goal toward which students will work during the year.

### Explain the rationale for the big goal

Students must have awareness of the specific learning objectives they lack. Educate students about the specific skills, knowledge and technical aspects that comprise the big goal. Example: one Los Angeles teacher we’ve met used this approach with her fourth graders, creating lessons plans about the learning objectives that would drive other lesson plans:

As a fourth grade teacher, I talked with my students about what the writing standards were for third, fourth, and fifth grades. We talked in student-friendly terms about what they had learned the previous year and how we were going to set our standards high and set a goal to achieve a fifth-grade standard. This approach worked with my students because I took the time to hear their input about what they had learned in third grade and they loved the idea of doing fifth-grade work!

### Relate lesson components to the big goal

Motivate students by demystifying what is otherwise a baffling, and seemingly arbitrary, parade of lessons, units, and assessments. Relate each day’s objective to the bigger picture goals. Identify the standards covered by each day’s lesson.

Middle School Example: Another Los Angeles teacher references his big goals every day in his sixth grade “Developing Readers and Writers” course. His students’ big goals are to improve by two grade levels in reading comprehension and to score a four or five on a demanding five-point writing rubric. So, under a big poster declaring those big goals, Mr. Small has two large graphic organizers. The first is titled Reading Comprehension and breaks down all the skills that go into reading, including decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies. Every time Mr. Small introduces a lesson or activity, he refers to that list, explaining how building the day’s skill will help reach the big goal in Reading Comprehension. For example, if the class is using context clues to determine word meaning, Mr. Small says to his students, ‘When we use context clues to find out what a word means in a sentence, our vocabulary skills will improve because we will know what the word means. To improve our reading comprehension, we need to understand what each word means in what we read. The students who want to reach their big goal will focus and try their best for this lesson!’

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Similarly, the second graphic organizer breaks down the Six Traits of Effective Writing that are evaluated by the rubric that defines students’ writing progress— Ideas/Content, Organization, Word Choice, Voice, Sentence Fluency, and Written Language Conventions. Mr. Small relates every single writing lesson to those skills, pointing out how each lesson is related to these traits of writing and will help them improve.

As Mr. Small attests, “this strategy is effective because it automatically connects the ‘why do?’ of every lesson to the achievement of Our Big Goal. I can also gauge the effectiveness of my lessons based upon how well the lesson teaches the necessary skills towards reaching our goal. Students also become highly motivated since they know what the goal is and how to reach it.”

High School Example: Rob LoPiccolo (South Louisiana, '99, High School Science) uses the class goals to drive instruction and motivate students. When you walk into his classroom, his big goals (achieving 80% of mastery of Louisiana’s Grade Level Expectations) are obvious—as is their importance and power. One entire wall of his science classroom is a chart of the fifty specific Grade Level Expectations (drawn from the state standards) that makes transparent the “technical” skills his students will master by the end of the year. He checks those objectives off as students progress. He also uses the opportunity of short-term unit goals to invest students in achieving mastery of each GLE.

He tells his students:

Mastering 80% of Louisiana’s Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) for science is our goal for the year. We have 50 of them. We’re going to do the first 27 of them in the first semester and the rest of them in the second semester. This is what we have to do to meet them. This is what it means to meet them. Now we’re going to keep track and we’re going to monitor our performance on the various tasks so you’ll be able to tell me what GLE I’m testing you on just by the assessment tool. And we’re going to master them all, and we’ll stay positive and have fun doing it.

He explains:

And that’s how they get motivated. When I check one of them off the board, they get excited about it, and it’s not, “we’re going to Disneyland!” It’s just, “We did it.” We set out to do it and we did it. I just sell it well enough so that’s good enough for them.

Mr. LoPiccolo explains how goal-setting at the beginning of each unit inspires his students’ efforts:

I’ve found that my students are more invested if I chop my content goals into short-term, unit-specific problems to solve. In some circles you might call them “essential understandings” or “guiding questions.” For example, at the beginning of my unit on speed, velocity, and acceleration I have a racecar driver come in and demonstrate the speed of his car. We see not only how fast it can go, but how fast it can speed up and slow down. I then ask the question “What can accelerate faster, a race car or a person?” It’s...immediate, it’s relevant and it’s exciting. Most importantly, kids really want to find out. I can keep them hooked on the topic for six weeks this way. At the end, they can answer that question [about the acceleration of cars and humans]. I break my year up into several of these smaller, more potent goals with great results.