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Improving Elementary Literacy Achievement by Aligning Individual and Team Goals

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Improving Elementary Literacy Achievement by Aligning Individual and Team Goals

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Capstone Project: A School Improvement Plan

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Abstract

Recent research suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted literacy achievement. A school improvement plan was created to improve literacy achievement by leveraging the positive effects of individual and team goal-setting on student motivation and student achievement. Past studies have shown that growth and learning goals are more effective than performance goals and that a combination of distal and proximal goals lead to optimal performance. This school improvement plan uses the Leader in Me framework to set proximal and distal goals, aligning all individual student goals with the school’s team goal, to improve literacy achievement.

*Keywords*: goal-setting, proximal goals, distal goals, learning goals, growth goals, team goals, goal alignment, literacy achievement
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Improving Elementary Literacy Achievement Through Individual and Team Goal Setting

Limited research exists regarding the effects of school closures from the COVID-19 pandemic on student achievement due to it being so recent. As of Spring 2024, many schools are still implementing temporary school closures or virtual learning days due to respiratory illnesses such as COVID-19 and Influenza, making it impossible to determine the long-term effects on student achievement. However, one study examined reading data from twenty different countries, studying over 300,000 students, and found a significant negative impact on reading achievement (Kennedy & Strietholt, 2023). Similarly, a study from Finland found that the COVID-19 pandemic had a larger impact on reading achievement than on math achievement (Lerkkanen et al., 2023). Grundy Center Elementary School literacy data follows this trend, with a 12% decline in only three years and the lowest proficiency scores at the school in the last decade, indicating a problem that must be addressed. Ninety-two percent of students at Grundy Center Elementary in Grundy Center, Iowa met the state literacy status on the FAST assessment in the fall of 2020, indicating that 92% of students had not missed the benchmark on two consecutive testing periods. One year later, only 85% of students met the same status. This decline continued, and at the start of the current 2023-2024 school year, only 79% of the elementary students met the literacy status, bringing reading scores lower than they have been in the past decade in Grundy Center.

Extensive research exists supporting Latham and Locke’s goal-setting theory (GST) (Baghurst et al., 2015; Hematian et al., 2017; Latham & Locke, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2001; Morisano et al., 2010; Rowe et al., 2017; Seijts & Latham, 2001; Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Sun & Frese, 2013; Travers et al., 2015). The theory has been applied in schools to academic goals related to literacy, math, behavior, social-emotional skills, and P.E. with
varying degrees of success (Baghurst et al., 2015; Hematian et al., 2017; Morisano et al., 2010; Morisano et al., 2013; Rowe et al., 2017; Sanders et al., 2023; Sides & Cuevas, 2020; Travers et al., 2015). However, limited research exists related to team goal setting in the academic arena. The purpose of this school improvement plan is to leverage the components of Locke and Latham’s GST (Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011) by implementing the Leader in Me framework (Fonzi & Ritchie, 2011) to create a sustainable system of cascading goals. All individual student goals will be aligned with team goals at each grade level and at the building level to improve reading achievement. The Leader in Me’s goal setting framework is known as the Four Disciplines of Execution (4DX) and includes all components that Locke and Latham (2006; 2007) identified as crucial for goal attainment. This plan will determine whether aligning individual and team goals in the academic setting will further impact reading achievement.

By strategically aligning and integrating individual and team-focused literacy goals, educators can significantly enhance literacy achievement outcomes and optimize personal growth for students and collective progress for the building. The hope is that the process will give teachers the tools that they need to improve large and small group literacy instruction and will motivate students to work toward literacy goals. Research for this school improvement plan utilized articles from both Google Scholar and the DeWitt Library at Northwestern College to gather scholarly journals. Research focused mainly on the GST and all of its components, particularly setting target goals for individuals’ needs.

The author believes that the GST can be used to set a single, distal growth goal for the elementary building, as Latham and Locke (2007) have shown that learning and growth goals can mediate the effects of individual goal orientation (Latham & Locke, 2007). This plan will apply the findings of Kramer et al., (2013) as all grade levels will have a single, distal growth
goal that supports the building-wide goal in an attempt to increase student motivation. All classroom and individual student goals will then be individualized to support students’ personal goal orientation and current achievement level, as the research shows that team goals are most likely to be met only when individual goals compliment and support that goal (Kramer et al., 2013).

The literature review is organized by key themes from the original goal setting theory and will continue adding new developments in the theory. The literature review will begin with the differences between learning, growth, and performance goals and will continue with details of personality types and goal-orientations. It will then break down learning, growth, and performance goals into two sub-categories, proximal and distal goals. The literature review will continue with a focus on factors that affect goal attainment for all goal types. Finally, the literature review will explain new research pertaining to setting multiple goals at both the individual and the team level including the factors that support optimal performance on interdependent goals amongst individuals and teams.
Review of the Literature

Types of Educational Goals

Learning, Growth, and Performance Goals

Locke and Latham’s original goal setting theory (GST) has been researched for decades, and as of 1990, had been supported in more than 88 different tasks in Asia, Australia, Europe, and North America in studies that included a combined 40,000 male and female participants (Locke & Latham, 2006). Research supporting the GST included goal setting at the individual, group, and organizational levels in both laboratory and field studies, on tasks that have ranged from one minute to 25 years, all with similar results (Locke & Latham, 2006). Results have remained generally consistent across gender and culture, allowing for Locke and Latham to identify specific goal types, two main goal-orientations, and factors that contribute to goal attainment or the lack thereof.

According to the GST, three main goal types exist: learning goals, growth goals, and performance goals. In his description of the GST, Lunenburg (2011) refers to learning and growth goals as those that target task mastery whereas a performance goal is one set strictly for high performance. Learning, growth, and performance goals can all increase performance when the goal is specific, difficult but attainable, well-accepted, and paired with specific feedback (Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011). However new research indicates that there may be times when performance goals can hinder performance (Baghurst et al., 2015; Latham & Locke, 2007; Seijts & Latham, 2001). Analyzing how performance goals can hinder performance is particularly important when setting academic goals.

In a Canadian study including 96 male and female participants, Seijts and Latham (2001) found that performance goals can negatively affect task performance when both learning and
motivation, rather than motivation alone, is required. During three separate 8-minute timed trials, on a task requiring new learning, Seijts and Latham (2001) found that the participants with a specific performance goal quickly moved back and forth between strategies, with no attempt at new learning. Their focus on achieving a high-performance goal distracted participants from the new learning, which had detrimental effects on their overall performance. On the other hand, they found that the participants that had set a specific learning goal outperformed those with a performance goal. Their learning goal of discovering a specific number of shortcuts allowed them to apply the new learning without the pressure of attaining a high-performance goal, increasing performance (Seijts and Latham, 2001). This study indicated that, when new learning is required, performance goals can move one’s focus away from the new learning and hinder performance. A learning goal, however, directs the focus to the new learning and has a positive impact on overall performance.

Baghurst et al., (2015) shared similar findings after their research on goal setting in physical education. In the physical education context, learning goals are referred to as process goals. Baghurst et al., (2015) confirm Seijts and Latham’s (2001) theory about performance goals hindering performance in some cases. Their recommendation following this research was to only set performance goals during practice in order to avoid poor performance caused by goal-related performance anxiety (Baghurst et al., 2015).

Perhaps the most important finding related to learning, growth, and performance goals is Latham and Locke’s (2007) statement that “…a specific high learning goal and cognitive ability appear to compensate for one another to some degree” (p. 294). A summary of their research indicated that participants with lower cognitive abilities who had set high learning goals performed comparably to those with much higher cognitive abilities that had set lower learning
goals (Latham & Locke, 2007). This same study also indicated that participants were more committed to both learning and growth goals than performance goals and that learning goals increased participants’ self-efficacy, whereas performance goals had the opposite effect (Latham & Locke, 2007).

Martin (2015) supported this finding in a study including 969 Australian high school students. Students completed a survey about their beliefs about intelligence, which was intended to reveal their beliefs about growth and fixed mindsets. Students were taken through a process of setting personal best growth goals throughout the term and given the same survey one year later (Martin, 2015). The results of this student confirmed Latham & Locke’s (2007) finding and indicated that the process of setting growth goals can impact one’s beliefs about intelligence. Martin (2015) demonstrated that setting and attaining growth goals can help students move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, supporting a learning orientation.

**Proximal and Distal Goals**

In a study including 62 female and 32 male participants, Seijts and Latham (2001) further broke down learning, growth, and performance goals into distal and proximal goals. A distal goal is an end-goal, or one set for long-term achievement. Distal goals have a clear end in mind, but are to be achieved too far into the future to change daily behaviors (e.g., I will improve in reading by three reading levels this school year). Although the distal goal is specific, difficult, and attainable, as stated by the GST, it may seem out of reach or something that can be put off until a later time and may not influence daily behaviors. Proximal goals, however, are short-term and should be directly related to the distal goal. They must provide clear markers of progress toward the distal goal (e.g., I will accurately decode CVC words; I will accurately read 15 sight words in 1 minute; I will demonstrate fluency by reading 20 words per minute). Seijts and
Latham’s (2001) research indicated that setting a single, difficult but attainable goal may not be enough if the goal is a distal goal. Their research indicated that a single specific distal learning goal, in addition to several aligned proximal learning goals, produced the best performance. Seijts and Latham (2001) used these results to demonstrate that a distal goal alone may not influence one’s daily activities, and therefore may not contribute to goal attainment (2001). However, a distal goal set with multiple proximal goals can increase feedback and be markers of progress, which leads to increased motivation and has a larger effect on daily activities (Seijts and Latham, 2001).

Travers et al. (2015) used a qualitative study to gather data related to the actual change process that occurs throughout the goal setting process. Their research supported Seijts and Latham’s (2001) results about proximal and distal goals. Ninety-two university students in the UK set growth goals related to their own academic performance and were asked to maintain daily diaries related to their goals. Analyses of the students’ diary entries indicated that the short-term proximal goals helped students build self-efficacy and motivation with short-term achievements, which kept them focused on the long-term distal goal that they had set to improve long-term academic performance (Travers et al., 2015). These results support those of Seijts and Latham’s (2001) research, which indicated that a single distal goal, in addition to several proximal goals, produced the best performance.

Performance and Learning Goal Orientations

According to Locke and Latham (2006) two goal orientations exist: learning and performance orientations. They found that perceiving a goal as a threat or a challenge can negatively impact an individual’s performance because one’s goal-orientation impacts their perception of goals as threats or challenges. Some people prefer to set goals in pursuit of task
mastery (i.e. I will learn four new reading strategies to improve reading fluency). Those who set these goals have a learning-goal orientation (Latham & Locke, 2007). Others prefer to set goals in pursuit of status, such as that of a high-performer (i.e. I will fluently read 60 words per minute). Those that set goals in pursuit of status have a performance-goal orientation (Latham & Locke, 2007). Morisano (2013) referred to performance goals as “ego-involved goals,” due to their pursuit of status. Attaining performance goals increases self-efficacy, while failure to attain the goal decreases self-efficacy (Locke & Latham, 2006; Seijts & Latham, 2001). The very process of setting learning and growth goals, however, increases self-efficacy and motivation regardless of whether goal is attained (Seijts et al., 2013).

Performance-goal orientations are associated with a fixed mindset, whereas a learning-goal orientation is associated with a growth mindset about one’s ability (Latham & Locke, 2007; Martin, 2015). This growth mindset associated with the learning orientation helps preserve self-efficacy and motivation when the goal is not attained (Martin, 2015; Seijts et al., 2013). The fixed mindset associated with performance orientation contributes to the lowering of self-efficacy and motivation, as the failure to meet a goal can serve as confirmation of the innate inability (Seijts et al., 2013).

Both learning goals and performance goals can increase performance when the goal is specific, difficult but attainable, well-accepted, and paired with specific feedback (Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011). However, one’s goal-orientation must be taken into consideration before asking someone to set a difficult goal. This is particularly important when setting goals with students, as a child’s self-efficacy and motivation are more quickly affected than an adult’s. When someone with a performance orientation has a goal that is perceived as a threat or too difficult, it can hinder rather than increase performance. LePine (2005) used a
decision-making simulation to study the effects of goal orientation and adaptability during goal pursuit. Teams scoring high on performance orientation measures performed lower after setting a high goal. LePine (2005) attributed the decline to a fear of demonstrating an unfavorable performance. Teams scoring high on learning orientation, on the other hand, performed much higher due to their growth mindset and commitment to task mastery (LePine, 2005).

People with performance-goal orientations tend to only select goals that they believe to be attainable (Locke & Latham, 2006). Errors or negative feedback during goal pursuit can negatively impact performance (Locke & Latham, 2006). However, people with learning-goal orientations tend to accept high goals easier because they view errors as a part of the learning process and are not as easily impacted by errors or negative feedback (Latham & Locke, 2007). This makes goal pursuit easier for those with learning orientations. Failure to meet a goal is also less damaging to self-efficacy for those with a learning orientation than a performance orientation.

It is not surprising that Morisano et al., (2010) found that low academic achievement has been linked to performance orientation and a lack of perceived academic control. They studied 85 university students, all identified as struggling academically. The study included 45 students in the goal group and 40 in the control group. Both groups were asked to participate in a writing activity involving a positive experience. The goal group was asked to write in detail about their ideal future and set personal goals to make their ideal future a reality, whereas the control group was asked to simply write about another positive experience with no connection to goal setting. Participants in the goal group shifted their beliefs from a lack of personal academic control to a sense of control over personal achievement. Results from this study indicated that it may be possible to develop a learning-goal orientation through the process of personal goal setting.
Teachers want to use caution when using performance goals during the goal-setting process with students, as the student’s goal orientation may be unknown. However, beginning a goal-setting process by setting growth and learning goals may positively impact on the self-efficacy, motivation, and commitment toward goals of many students regardless of their goal orientation. Since it may be possible to develop a learning-goal orientation through personal goal setting (Morisano et al., 2010) and learning goals can compensate for lower cognitive abilities (Latham & Locke, 2007), setting personal growth and learning goals is worthwhile. Performance goals, however, should be avoided.

**Factors Affecting Goals**

For optimal performance all goals must be specific, difficult but attainable, well-accepted, include specific feedback, and include an accountability measure (Latham & Locke, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011; Seijts & Latham, 2001). One’s goal orientation, can affect overall performance in a variety of ways (Latham & Lock, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2006; Lunenburg, 2011). One’s goal orientation affects both how goals are perceived and whether or not they are easily accepted.

Goal framing can also affect goal attainment in both positive and negative ways (Elliott et al., 2015; Latham & Locke, 2007). Research by Latham and Locke (2007) indicates that framing goals positively (i.e. I will answer 90% of the questions correctly) can lead to better performance than negative framing (i.e. I will not miss more than 10% of the questions), especially for those with a performance orientation. Elliott et al., (2015) supported this theory in their study comparing goals set by university students to determine the effects of positive and negative framing. Students set individual goals, which were documented and categorized positively as approach goals (i.e. I will do better than the last time) or negatively as avoidance goals (i.e. I will
not do worse than the last time) (Elliot et al., 2015). Positively framed approach goals (I will do better than the last time) increased both motivation and self-efficacy (Elliot et al., 2015). Negatively framed avoidance goals (I will not do worse than the last time) lowered motivation, self-efficacy, and overall performance (Elliot et al., 2015). This study confirmed Locke and Latham’s (2007) finding that framing goals positively and committing to specific, positive feedback, is highly motivating for all, but can be crucial in maintaining the motivation and self-efficacy of those with a performance orientation.

**Multiple-Goal Pursuit**

**Multiple Individual Goals**

While setting individual goals can be very complex, setting multiple goals complicates the process even further. In fact, Sun and Frese (2013) caution setting multiple, separate goals, as they can take resources from one another. Time is a limited resource and attempting to focus on too many goals can be detrimental to the success of either goal (Sun & Frese, 2013). This is crucial for teachers, as it can be tempting to encourage students to set multiple goals. Teachers may feel the pressure to help students set a goal in multiple content areas such as: I will improve in reading by three reading levels; I will improve in math by five points on my post-test; I will improve on the piano by practicing 20 minutes every night. However, the limited resource of time will force the student to choose which goal to work toward on any given day, therefore lowering overall performance on any or all goals over time (Sun & Frese, 2013).

While multiple unrelated goals are not effective, two highly effective categories of multiple goal setting exist: sequentially interdependent and reciprocally interdependent goals (Sun & Frese, 2013). For goals to be sequentially interdependent, the first goal (proximal goal) must be met for the following goal (distal goal) to be met (Seijts & Latham, 2001; Sun & Frese,
Setting sequentially interdependent goals will align the goals so that they are not competing for time. For example: I will learn all 26 letter sounds; I will read CVC words with 90% accuracy; I will improve by one reading level. The proximal goals of learning letter sounds and reading CVC words with 90% accuracy will ultimately lead to the student achieving the distal goal of improving by one reading level.

Similarly, another category of multiple goals, reciprocally interdependent goals, can be highly effective. When goals are reciprocally interdependent, progress toward either goal supports the attainment of another (Sun & Frese, 2013). Results of a study by Rowe et al. (2017) supported this theory, demonstrating that behavioral goals and academic goals are not unrelated, but are reciprocally interdependent goals. A group of six middle school students, all at risk of academic failure, received goal setting instruction for 30 minutes and set goals to improve both student engagement and academic achievement (Rowe et al., 2017). As student engagement increased, so did academic achievement (Rowe et al., 2017). This study supported the theory of reciprocally interdependent goals, as the goals continued to simultaneously support each other throughout the study. Teachers should consider students that appear unmotivated or are disengaged during the goal setting process. In this case, a goal targeting student engagement may be beneficial in supporting the student’s academic goal.

**Team Goals**

Team goal setting can be even more complex due to multiple goal orientations and a variety of individual goals on a single team. Kramer et al., (2013) emphasized the importance of setting interdependent individual goals that complement a larger, team goal. They found that teams with interdependent goals built collective efficacy in the same way that attaining individual goals built self-efficacy (Kramer et al., 2013). Goal commitment was more important
at the team level than at the individual level, as the team goal required a collective effort of all individuals (Kramer et al., 2013).

While not yet studied in the academic arena, Senécal et al. (2008) studied 86 female teenage basketball players provided insight into the effects of goal setting on team cohesion. The control group of this study participated in many team-building activities in an attempt to build team cohesion, while the experimental group set a distal goal, as well as several proximal goals, in lieu of the team-building activities. By the end of the season, the experimental goal-setting group had learned that depending on each other was crucial for their individual and team success, and team cohesion improved. The control group, despite their team-building efforts, did not learn to depend on each other or improve the cohesion of the team like the control group.

Team goal setting can improve cohesion of the team and overall performance. Setting a distal goal as a team, with supportive proximal goals for each member of the team, can direct attention and give team members the energy and incentive needed to support that goal (Kramer et al., 2013). This research indicates that a building-wide distal literacy goal, with individual proximal goals for every student, can improve literacy achievement. The students’ individual proximal goals, which target their current level of achievement, will continue to build their self-efficacy and motivation with their short-term achievements, as demonstrated by Travers et al. (2015) in their analysis of the change process throughout the goal setting-process. Furthermore, this process can help each grade-level team build cohesion and a sense of collective efficacy, as demonstrated by Senécal et al., (2008) in their research about team goal setting and team building.
School Profile

Student Enrollment

Grundy Center is a small, rural Iowa community. According to the Iowa Department of Education certified enrollment data, Grundy Center had 742 students enrolled for the 2023-2024 school year. Grundy Center is considerably less diverse than most communities, with 98.9% of their students identifying as white and only 3% identifying as multi-racial. In comparison, the overall breakdown for white and multi-racial students in the state of Iowa is 72.4% and 4.9% respectively. Grundy Center’s gender distribution is comparable to the state average, with 52.5% male students and 54.7% female students. Only .3% of Grundy Center students are English Language Learners (ELL) compared to the state average of 6.9%. Similarly, only 28.98% of Grundy Center’s students are eligible for free and reduced lunch compared to the state average of 42.3%. Grundy Center has a slightly lower percentage of students in special education than the state average, with 12.5% compared to the state average of 13.4%.

Parental Involvement

It is worth noting that Grundy Center Elementary is fortunate to have strong parental involvement. Most teachers have a regular schedule of parent volunteers. These volunteers do a variety of things, including prepare crafts, read with students, provide additional practice for mastery of both sight words and math facts, and more. Fall conference data for the elementary school revealed 99% conference attendance by families. All students have leadership notebooks that contain literacy and math data, which are shared with parents in a variety of ways. Some teachers send leadership notebooks home monthly, while others send them home once every trimester.
School District Mission and Vision

The Grundy Center School District’s (GCSD) mission is to “Foster a caring and safe environment for all to connect, learn, and grow.” Supporting that mission is the district’s vision: “Preparing all to value relationships, pursue excellence, and expand potential.” Both the mission and vision were created through collaboration amongst all district staff. They were created through a combination of whole-staff, building-wide, and grade-level collaboration. All grade levels were provided opportunities to explore curriculum and standards and how they align with the district’s mission and vision.

The elementary school is a Leader in Me school, which supports both the mission and vision of the district. All grade levels spend the first eight days of the school year teaching the seven habits: be proactive; begin with the end in mind; put first things first; think win-win; seek first to understand, then to be understood; synergize; and sharpen the saw. Students have many opportunities to build and foster relationships through various leadership opportunities throughout the year.

Elementary staff has participated in building-wide professional development to shift to the core paradigms of the Leader in Me. These paradigms include:

- **Paradigm of Leadership:** Everyone can be a leader.
- **Paradigm of Potential:** Everyone has genius.
- **Paradigm of Change:** Change starts with me.
- **Paradigm of Motivation:** Empower students to lead their own learning.
- **Paradigm of Education:** Educators and families partner to develop the whole person.
Student Learning Goals

Students are assessed through a variety of state assessments including the Formative Assessment Screener for Teachers (FAST), Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), and the Iowa Statewide Assessment of Student Progress (ISASP). The Grundy Center Elementary building goal for reading states: 80% of GCSD students will demonstrate proficiency in reading as measured on FAST. All teachers are asked to have a classroom goal and a grade-level goal for each grade-level, although no current expectation of goal-alignment exists. Teachers are encouraged, but not required, to set individual goals with their students. These goals can be in any area including reading, math, or behavior.

School Performance

The ESSA report shows that Grundy Center Elementary students exceed the state average in both reading and math, as measured by ISASP. Eighty percent of third and fourth graders were proficient in English Language Arts, compared to 71.5% of Iowa third and fourth graders in 2022-2023. Similarly, 81.82% of GCSD third and fourth graders demonstrated proficiency in mathematics, compared to 69.5% of Iowa third and fourth graders. However, growth in mathematics was of great concern. Only 32.5% of GCSD third and fourth graders demonstrated acceptable growth in mathematics, compared to the state average of 50%. While growth in English and Language Arts was above the state average for 2022-2023, this is typically also an area of concern.

FAST data reveals a decline in foundational literacy skills for elementary students. The goal of 80% of students demonstrating proficiency on FAST has historically been achieved but has been steadily dropping since the 2020-2021 school year. As measured by FAST, 92% of GCSD elementary students met literacy status in the fall of 2020, dropping to 85% in the fall of
2021, 82% in the fall of 2022, and dropping below the 80% goal in the fall of 2023 with 79% of GC elementary students meeting literacy status.

**Curriculum, Instructional Strategies & Assessment Practices**

GC elementary adopted a new phonics curriculum in 2021-2022. Kindergarten through fourth grade classrooms began using 95% Phonics Core Program in the fall of 2021 and Transitional Kindergarten began using Really Great Reading: Countdown. One year later, in the fall of 2022, Kindergarten through fourth grade classrooms began using Into Reading by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) and Transitional Kindergarten began using the differentiated materials for TK from McGraw Hill’s Preschool World of Wonders for reading comprehension.

Adopting new curriculum in both phonics and reading has provided consistency and accountability for tier I instruction. However, small group reading instruction is not consistent amongst grade levels. Some teachers have some previous experience in districts that had provided professional development in the Science of Reading (SOR), whereas some teachers are completely unfamiliar with the SOR. Some teachers are keeping small reading groups skill-based and using decodable readers, whereas others believe firmly in leveled texts and are using Scholastic leveled readers for small group instruction. Assessments include a combination of decoding skills and running records.

A WIN (What I Need) time was established for first through fourth grades in January 2024. All students were given the Phonics Skills Inventory (PSI) and put in mixed-grade level groups according to the phonics skill that they are currently working toward mastering. All specials teachers and TLC staff are included in this WIN time for students to receive Tier II phonics instruction. Students are to be assessed with the PSI every six weeks and regrouped building-wide. The goal is to fill in decoding gaps and to ensure that all students are receiving
instruction tailored to their individual needs. Currently, there are mixed reviews and no data exists yet to determine its effectiveness.

**Needs Assessment**

The 2024-2025 school year at Grundy Center Elementary should focus on the new partnership with the regional Leader in Me organization known as Leader Valley to ensure high quality professional development and leveraging the 4DX process to build staff capacity in literacy instruction. Further training on the 4DX process should be offered to all certified staff. Staff should repeat the initial 4DX training and use the process to set personal goals and then receive additional training to set professional goals to improve literacy instruction. After mastering the 4DX process for staff goals, further coaching from Leader Valley should support staff in applying the process to individual student goal setting, and ultimately team goal setting, for literacy.

Grundy Center Elementary began the journey to becoming a Leader in Me school in the 2019-2020 school year. However, no structured training or organized professional development were available to staff at this time. Staff were given the opportunity to read *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and *The Leader in Me*, both written by Stephen R. Covey. Staff were encouraged, although not mandated, to begin making small changes to their classrooms focusing on student leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the quality of professional development sessions during the following school year. Staff participated in Franklin Covey’s Core I training in the fall of 2020. This training took place in a large gymnasium, with all staff members wearing masks and maintaining a six-foot distance from one another to ensure the health and safety of participants. The goal of the training was to help staff shift their paradigms and beliefs around student leadership. Core I training was meant to empower staff to begin
creating a leadership school by teaching the seven habits to students and offering leadership opportunities to all students. Staff engagement was limited as many voiced their stress of returning to the 2020-2021 school year with many questions related to the pandemic including:

- Is it possible to attempt a shift in culture during the pandemic, when many staff and students are stressed and scared for their health and safety?
- What leadership opportunities are feasible due to the restrictions during the pandemic?

Additionally, staff struggled to be fully present in the training as they asked many other questions specific to literacy instruction including:

- How will face coverings affect students with speech and language difficulties?
- How will face coverings affect phonics instruction without showing students correct vowel production?

Although staff members shared valid concerns related to beginning the Leader in Me journey in the middle of the pandemic, many questions went unanswered. Staff were advised to do their best under the circumstances, which Locke and Latham (2006; 2007) have proven is highly ineffective. Core II training began in the 2021-2022 school year and focused on leveraging Franklin Covey’s 4DX goal setting framework. This training included:

- Personal goal setting
- Team goal setting at the classroom, grade-level, and building level
- Tracking goals privately and publicly
- Creating a system of accountability partners
- Aligning individual, classroom, grade-level, and building-wide goals

Staff members expressed concern over not understanding the basics of the 4DX goal setting process. They asked for support in deciding when to track goals privately or publicly and how to
align all individual goals to a building-wide goal. Many staff members expressed their fears about managing all of these goals without understanding the basics of the process. Questions remained unanswered and staff were again advised to do their best under the circumstances despite their lack of knowledge about the very process they were trying to implement.

During this same timeframe, professional development opportunities in literacy were limited throughout the district. All professional development opportunities were related to the Leader in Me, math, or were curriculum-specific for both phonics and reading. The trainings for the phonics and reading curriculums were both intended to teach staff how to access and use the materials, but were not related to the process of reading.

In the fall of 2023, a specialist from the Area Education Agency (AEA) came for a literacy session about dyslexia. This training included statistics, facts, and myths about dyslexia. Staff members shared their misunderstandings about dyslexia and requested further training on research-based interventions to support struggling readers. Teachers were left to seek out professional development in this area, as no additional training was available. However, the state of Iowa announced that they would offer the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) for free. Several teachers asked if this could be a focus for building-wide professional development, as it would be a two-year intensive commitment for teachers to complete outside of their current responsibilities. Unfortunately, a building-wide effort would not be offered, and discussions began about the administration prioritizing the Leader in Me over quality literacy instruction.

Discussions continued about the correlation between Leader in Me implementation and a decline in literacy scores. FAST data indicated that 92% of Grundy Center elementary students were proficient in reading as the Leader in Me implementation began in the fall of 2020. After
three years of Leader in Me implementation, only 79% of Grundy Center elementary students were proficient in reading. Questions were raised about the quality of training provided by Franklin Covey and the effectiveness of the Leader in Me program for the school.

While there does appear to be a correlation between Leader in Me implementation and a decline in reading achievement in Grundy Center, without controlling for external factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is impossible to determine a valid correlation. Kennedy and Strietholt (2023) found that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted reading achievement in more than 29 countries. Lerkkanen et al. (2023) also demonstrated that literacy scores dropped significantly more than math scores. As Grundy Center Elementary literacy scores declined, teachers identified the need for professional development related to the Science of Reading (SOR). Many became frustrated about focusing on the Leader in Me instead of SOR, as the initial training did not help staff make the necessary connections between the two.

More than three decades worth of research identifies goal setting as one of the most effective strategies in improving performance in any area (Locke & Latham, 2006). It is unlikely that the 4DX goal setting framework within the Leader in Me model is contributing to a decline in literacy achievement. It is more likely that factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as indicated by Kennedy and Strietholt (2023), and a lack of quality professional development following the pandemic have contributed to this decline.

Grundy Center Elementary school completed their partnership with Franklin Covey in the spring of 2023 and began a partnership with Leader Valley, located in Cedar Valley of Iowa, in the summer of 2023. All Leader Valley schools are accredited by Franklin Covey as Leader in Me schools. Leader Valley partners with 27 schools in Cedar Valley, collectively serving more than 1,400 educators and more than 11,800 students (Leader in Me, 2024). Leader Valley’s
regional approach allows for high quality professional development, effective coaching opportunities, and has created the world’s highest concentration of schools reaching the highest level of Leader in Me implementation, known as lighthouse schools. Of the 27 Leader in Me schools in the Cedar Valley, nine (33%) have reached lighthouse status. This is significant, as only 10% of Leader in Me schools worldwide attain the status of a lighthouse school. Leader Valley’s regional approach has created a system of high-quality coaching and has led them to the region tripling the world’s average of lighthouse schools.

Grundy Center Elementary must provide the training necessary to allow staff to shift their understanding of the Leader in Me, in particular, the 4DX process. Staff need the training to leverage the 4DX process to improve academics, particularly literacy. As staff receive high-quality training from a Leader Valley coach and set individual and team goals related to literacy, they will likely begin to build collective efficacy, as shown by Kramer et al. (2013). Furthermore, as staff begin to understand the process of aligning individual and team goals, the entire building can begin to build collective efficacy amongst both staff and students. Focusing professional development opportunities on leveraging the 4DX process will allow staff to significantly improve literacy performance.

**Data Analysis**

Ninety-two percent of students at Grundy Center Elementary met the state literacy status according to the FAST assessment in the fall of 2020. Students meet the literacy status after meeting the current benchmark and only lose their literacy status after missing the benchmark during two consecutive testing periods. Students regain their literacy status after meeting the benchmark during two consecutive testing periods. However, in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, these scores steadily declined (see Figure 1). Scores steadily declined from 92% in
the fall of 2020 to 85% in the fall of 2021, 85% in the fall of 2022, and 79% of students meeting literacy status in the fall of 2023.

Students meeting the current benchmark have shown the same steady decline (see Figure 1) since the COVID-19 pandemic. Seventy-seven percent of students met the fall benchmark in 2020, dropping to 74% meeting the benchmark in the fall of 2021 and the fall of 2022, and dropping even further to 66% of Grundy Center Elementary students meeting the benchmark in fall of 2023.

**Figure 1**

*2020-2023 Building-wide Fall FAST Assessment Scores*

The Phonological Awareness Skills Inventory (PASI) was given to all kindergarten students following the fall 2023 FAST assessment to identify skill strengths and deficits. All kindergarten students were placed into an intervention group (WIN) to target each student’s phonological awareness weaknesses. Similarly, all first through fourth-grade students were given
the Phonics Skills Inventory (PSI) in the fall of 2023 and received targeted phonics instruction within their classrooms.

Figure 2 compares the winter FAST scores from 2020-2024. Winter scores for the current 2023-2024 school year show a slightly smaller decline each school year than the fall scores. There has been a six percent decline in proficiency since the winter of the 2020-2021 school year. There has been a slightly smaller decline in students meeting the literacy status, dropping three percent since the 2020-2021 school year.

**Figure 2**

*2020-2024 Winter Building-wide FAST Assessment Scores*

The 95% Phonics Core curriculum recommends administering the PSI to any student that falls below 95% on the FAST screener, as this indicates a phonics deficit. Phonics and decoding skills were identified as a significant weakness for the majority of students in the building, as both fall and winter assessments are showing a consistent decline in both proficiency and overall literacy status. A building-wide WIN time was established in January 2024 for first through
fourth-grade students to address this deficit. All students were given the PSI and broken into skill-based decoding groups for WIN. The PSI breaks decoding skills down into the following categories: (a) identifying letter names and sounds; (b) VC and CVC pattern; (c) consonant blends; (d) digraphs; (e) long vowel and silent -e; (f) predictable vowel teams; (g) unpredictable vowel teams; (h) -r controlled vowels; (i) complex consonants; (j) closed syllables; (k) long vowel silent -e syllables within words; (l) open syllables; (m) vowel team syllables; (n) consonant -le syllables; (o) vowel -r syllables.

All WIN groups began working on difficult, but attainable, proximal literacy learning goals based on the results of the PSI assessment (e.g., We will learn to decode words using the VC and CVC pattern; We will learn to read words using consonant blends; We will learn to read words with digraphs). While all students were actively working on a proximal literacy goal, students were not participating in a goal setting process or tracking their own progress. All data was tracked by the student achievement coordinator and shared with teachers within the WIN process, but students were not involved in any way.

The breakdown of students below their current grade level is shown in figures 3-5. The first three-week intervention included 45% of students below their current grade level, 47% at their current grade level, and 8% above their current grade level (see Figure 3). The second three-week intervention showed significant improvement and included 35% of students below their current grade level, 48% at their current grade level, and 17% above their current grade level (see Figure 4). The third three-week intervention included 22% of students below their current grade level, 52% at their current grade level, and 27% above their current grade level (see Figure 5). There was a significant increase in students receiving a decoding intervention at and
above their current grade level, with a decrease in students receiving a decoding intervention below their current grade level.

**Figure 3**

*Round 1 WIN Intervention Breakdown*
Figure 4

*Round 2 WIN Intervention Breakdown*

![Pie chart showing Decoding Skills breakdown: Below Grade Level, At Grade Level, Above Grade Level.]

Figure 5

*Round 3 WIN Intervention Breakdown*

![Pie chart showing Decoding Skills breakdown: Below Grade Level, At Grade Level, Above Grade Level.]

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**IMPROVING LITERACY ACHIEVEMENT WITH ALIGNED GOALS**  

30
Transitional kindergarten (TK) students were not included in the building-wide WIN time due to a different phonics curriculum. The TK classroom uses Really Great Reading: Countdown for phonics instruction. In the fall of 2023, only 36 percent of TK students were proficient on the FAST assessment. Fall scores were significantly lower than the building-wide scores due to the TK selection process, as students were selected for the TK program for tier II intervention before beginning kindergarten. TK students were given the Foundational Skills Survey (FSS), similar to the PASI from the 95% Core phonics curriculum given to kindergarten students, to determine phonological awareness interventions. Students received targeted interventions based on this assessment, similar to the process of all other grade levels in the building.

However, unlike all other grade levels, TK students began the 4DX goal-setting process immediately following the fall FAST assessment. Students worked as a team to set a distal growth goal of: 100% of TK students will improve in reading this year. Students then created proximal team goals (known as lead measures in the 4DX framework) including:

- We will actively participate in phonics every day.
- We will actively participate in our reading group with the teacher every day.

Students tracked their lead measures every day during class and celebrated every month that they met their proximal team goal. Celebrations included extra recess, a game day, show and tell, a hot chocolate party, and more. Small groups began and targeted the students’ current phonological awareness and phonics skills, as indicated by the FSS. Each student used their leadership notebook to set a proximal learning goal, which was sequentially interdependent (Sun & Frese, 2013) on the classroom distal goal.

The fall literacy data, as measured by FAST, for TK students at Grundy Center Elementary was significantly lower than the building-wide proficiency data. However, after the
4DX goal setting process for one trimester, current 2023-2024 students improved from 35% proficient in the fall of 2023 to 93% proficient in the winter of 2023 on the FAST assessment (see Figure 6). Only one student fell below the benchmark for FAST, missing this benchmark by a single point.

**Figure 6**

*Fall-Winter FAST Assessment Scores by Grade Level for 2023-2024 School Year*

This significant growth in reading proficiency can be attributed to the alignment of all individual student learning goals with a single classroom growth goal toward which all students were working. This data supports Seijts and Latham’s (2001) finding that setting a single specific learning goal, in addition to several aligned proximal learning goals, produced the best performance. Performance goals were avoided in this classroom in favor of learning and growth goals. Students maintained motivation from September 2023-January 2024 as they tracked and celebrated their proximal goals, supporting the findings of Travers et al., (2015).
Findings from the Measurable Annual Results Assessment (MRA), given each spring, showed an interesting connection between the Leader in Me implementation process and literacy scores, as shown in Figure 7. The MRA data begins in April 2022 rather than 2020, as the Leader in Me Core II training targeting goal setting took place during the 2021-2022 school year. The MRA is a survey given each spring to all staff, students, and families to analyze the impact of the Leader in Me framework. The MRA demonstrates an impact on leadership, culture, and academics for the current school year.

Respondents have identified a decline in instructional efficacy. The MRA defines instructional efficacy as “teachers are confident in their ability to use evidence-based instructional practices to amplify students’ capacity to learn.” In the spring of 2022, 78% of respondents gave a satisfactory rating of the instructional efficacy of staff. In the spring of 2023, this dropped to 74%. In the spring of 2024, satisfactory ratings for instructional efficacy dropped even further to 72%.

Student-led practices, defined by the MRA as “teachers empower students to play a more proactive role as they apply their knowledge and skill to accelerate and deepen their learning” showed a similar decline on the MRA survey. Eighty-three percent of staff and students gave a satisfactory rating in the spring of 2022. This dropped to 81% in the spring of 2023 and to 75% in April 2024.

The MRA also analyzes the impact of both individual student goals and building-wide team goals. School goals showed a similar decline as instructional efficacy and student-led practices. Seventy-four percent of respondents believed that all teachers have a meaningful role in schoolwide goals and that all progress is regularly tracked, reflected on, and used to make
decisions in the spring of 2022. This dropped to 67% in the spring of 2023 and to 65% in the spring of 2024.

In comparison, satisfactory ratings of student goals increased recently. The MRA survey measures student confidence in their ability to set and achieve their goals. Seventy-eight percent of respondents gave student goals a satisfactory rating in the spring of 2022. This dropped to 73% in the spring of 2023, but rose again to 77% in April 2024. While setting individual goals has been a building-wide priority, the MRA data showed a lack of alignment of individual student goals to building-wide team goals.

Figure 7
April 2022-2024 Leader in Me MRA Survey

The decline in instructional efficacy and student-led practices could further explain the decline in literacy achievement. Furthermore, a lack of commitment to school goals may contribute to the decline in literacy achievement, as goal acceptance and commitment are crucial for goal attainment (Kramer et al., 2013; Latham & Locke, 2007; Locke & Latham, 2006;
Sanders et al., 2023). The increase in students’ abilities to set and achieve their goals is promising. While first through fourth-grade students have not been actively involved in the goal-setting process of the WIN groups, they have been reaching a specific, difficult, but attainable goal and being moved to a different group with a new specific, difficult, but attainable goal.

This school improvement plan will expand the current system of individual and team goal alignment used in the TK classroom to the entire building to improve reading achievement. The plan will leverage the 4DX goal setting process with the current first through fourth grade WIN groups, allowing students at every grade level to set a distal team goal, as well as several interdependent proximal goals, for the 2024-2025 school year.

**Action Plan**

**Strategies**

After reviewing relevant literature, multiple themes were identified in support of Locke and Latham’s original goal setting theory and the Leader in Me 4DX goal setting process. These themes include: (a) the different types of educational goals; (b) the effect of one’s performance or learning goal orientation on their motivation to pursue a difficult goal; (c) factors that support and hinder goal attainment; and (d) the process of setting multiple individual and team goals.

Professional development must be provided for teachers to learn the difference between performance goals and learning or growth goals, as high-performance goals can hinder performance when new learning is required to meet the goal (Seijts & Latham, 2001). Furthermore, professional development must include the difference between distal and proximal goals, as setting distal goals alone has not been effective in the past at Grundy Center Elementary. Seijts and Latham (2001) stress the importance of setting a single distal goal, with multiple supporting proximal goals, for best performance.
Professional development sessions at Grundy Center Elementary will target the 4DX goal setting process through its partnership with Leader Valley for the 2024-2025 school year. Each Training will include all four components of the 4DX process, as shown in Table 1. These components should be broken down in detail at the personal level, professional level, and ultimately applied to student goals (see Table 1).

Staff at Grundy Center Elementary attempted this process during the 2021-2022 school year with little success. However, staff set a building-wide performance goal instead of a learning or growth goal due to a lack of understanding of the goal setting theory and the 4DX framework. This performance goal led to extreme pressure for teachers to reach this goal in their own classrooms and damaged collective efficacy when the goal was not reached, as LePine (2005) and Seijts and Latham (2001) suggested.

The 4DX goal setting process should be broken into two half day sessions, allowing staff to fully understand and implement the 4DX framework with fidelity, and leading to an improvement in literacy achievement.

Table 1

Breakdown of 4DX Training Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4DX Component</th>
<th>August Personal Goal Setting Training Objectives</th>
<th>October Professional Goal Setting Training Objectives</th>
<th>November Student Goal Setting Training Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the wildly important</td>
<td>How to identify a wildly important area of my life in need of improvement</td>
<td>How to identify a wildly important area of professional development for my literacy instruction</td>
<td>How to use student data to identify a wildly important component of literacy instruction at each grade level that needs to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to set a difficult, but attainable, goal in this area</td>
<td>How to set a difficult, but attainable, distal learning or growth goal related to literacy instruction</td>
<td>How to create a team (building-wide) distal growth goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to set a distal goal with interdependent proximal goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to act on lead measures</td>
<td>How to set interdependent proximal learning or growth goals supporting this distal goal</td>
<td>How to create a team (grade-level) distal growth goal</td>
<td>How to create a team (classroom) distal growth goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to identify crucial behaviors that will lead to goal attainment</td>
<td>How to identify crucial daily actions to meet the proximal goals</td>
<td>How to identify and leverage high-quality lead measures</td>
<td>How to publicly track lead measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to track my personal goal</td>
<td>How to privately track lead measures</td>
<td>When and how to track private goals</td>
<td>How to find an accountability partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to find an accountability partner</td>
<td>How to find a compatible colleague for an accountability partner</td>
<td>Create a sustainable system of accountability for team goals within your own classroom</td>
<td>How to create a sustainable system of meeting with an accountability partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to create a sustainable system of meeting with an accountability partner</td>
<td>How to create a sustainable system of meeting with an accountability partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Steps to Solve the Problem**

The following steps describe the professional development plan for the 2024-2025 school year. These steps will ensure that all staff understand the 4DX goal setting process and have the tools that they need to implement the process with fidelity within the cascading system of team
and individual goals. It is important to note the difference between Lighthouse Coordinators (LC) and the Lighthouse Team. The building has three LCs, responsible for organizing the systems that support Leader in Me implementation within the building. The building lighthouse team includes twelve members: one representative at each grade level, two administrators, one representative from specials, a teacher leadership coordinator (TLC), a model classroom teacher, and a reading interventionist. Lighthouse coordinators are included on the lighthouse team, with one being an administrator and two being classroom teachers.

1. All staff will attend a half-day 4DX personal goal setting training (see Table 1) before the start of the 2024-2025 school year.
   a. All staff will set personal Wildly Important Goals (W.I.G.s)
   b. All staff will choose an accountability partner.
   c. Staff will have opportunities at all Wednesday team meetings to share their progress toward personal W.I.G.s.
   d. Monthly celebrations will be held in the staff lounge for staff members who attain a W.I.G. throughout the month.

2. All staff will attend a second half-day 4DX training (see Table 1) in October to apply the process to professional goal setting.
   a. All staff will set professional W.I.G.s related to literacy instruction.
   b. All staff will choose an accountability partner within the building.
   c. Friday mornings will continue being designated to meeting with accountability partners.
   d. Staff will have opportunities at all Wednesday team meetings to share their progress toward personal or professional W.I.G.s.
3. LC will create a scoreboard to track all growth toward professional goals related to literacy instruction.
   a. LC will update the scoreboard monthly and will celebrate progress in the staff lounge.

4. All staff will attend a third full day 4DX training (see Table 1) in November to apply the process to student goal setting.
   a. The lighthouse team will set a building-wide growth goal for literacy. This goal will be shared at a schoolwide assembly in addition to possibilities for a schoolwide celebration.
   b. Each grade level team will set a team growth goal for literacy and share with students.
   c. All students and teachers will collaborate and agree on a goal celebration.
   d. Each classroom teacher will collaborate with students to create a team growth goal for literacy and a goal celebration with students.
   e. All students will set an individual learning goal for literacy.
      i. Each student will choose his or her own celebration and will track this W.I.G. privately in an individual leadership notebook.

5. The lighthouse team will work together to create a building-wide system for celebrating goal achievement on a monthly basis. All classrooms will celebrate goal achievement on a weekly basis.

6. A larger building-wide system for celebrating goal achievement will occur at the end of each trimester.
Implementation of School Improvement Plan

Timeline

A thorough timeline must be created and executed with fidelity for successful implementation of the 4DX goal setting process (see Table 2 below). Lighthouse Coordinators must meet with the Leader Valley coach in May of 2024 for the final coaching session of the 2023-2024 school year. Lighthouse coordinators will finalize dates for the initial half-day 4DX training in August 2024, second half-day 4DX training in October 2024, and final full-day training in November 2024. Furthermore, the building Lighthouse team must dedicate time for accountability partners on Friday mornings when creating the 2024-2025 schedule. During the school year, Lighthouse Coordinators will do monthly accountability checks to ensure that all classrooms are working toward a shared W.I.G. Team scoreboards will be updated monthly to ensure that all classrooms are contributing to the schoolwide W.I.G.

Staff Responsibilities

Lighthouse Coordinators

Lighthouse coordinators will meet with the Leader Valley coach to plan for the 4DX training sessions. Additionally, they will be responsible for adding time to every team meeting agenda to celebrate progress toward all personal and professional W.I.G.s. The Lighthouse coordinators will collaborate with the building’s culture club to create and maintain a staff scoreboard, located in the staff lounge, and a schoolwide literacy scoreboard, located in the lunchroom. They will collaborate with the academic action team, particularly the Student Achievement Coordinator (SAC), to support the alignment of students’ individual proximal literacy goals with their current WIN group. Lighthouse coordinators will collaborate with the social committee to plan celebrations in the staff lounge.
Building Lighthouse Team

The building Lighthouse team will create the 2024-2025 schedule. They must ensure adequate time on Friday mornings to allow staff the opportunity to meet with accountability partners. They must also include a minimum of twenty minutes for a building-wide morning meeting time, allowing all classrooms the opportunity to celebrate their progress toward personal and team W.I.G.s. Each member of the building Lighthouse team will communicate with appropriate grade level teams to hold each other accountable for the 4DX process.

Classroom Teachers

Each classroom teacher will be responsible for creating a classroom W.I.G. related to literacy and supporting the schoolwide W.I.G. Each classroom teacher will create a scoreboard in their classrooms showing growth toward this W.I.G. Furthermore, all three classroom teachers at each grade level must collaborate to create a grade-level W.I.G. related to literacy, and supporting the schoolwide W.I.G., toward which all students are working. They must collaborate to create a scoreboard demonstrating progress toward this goal to be displayed in the hallway. Classroom teachers will support individual students in creating a meaningful growth or learning goal that supports the team goals.

Students

Students will create a learning or growth goal for literacy with teachers’ support. Students will include meaningful action steps, a compelling scoreboard, and choose an accountability partner. Students will commit to supporting all team goals by actively working toward his/her individual goal.

Leader Valley Coach

The Leader Valley coach must meet with all staff for the three 4DX trainings in August, October, and November. Furthermore, she must meet with the Lighthouse coordinators for three
additional coaching sessions throughout the 2024-2025 school year. She must meet with the building Lighthouse team at least twice throughout the 2024-2025 school year. She will also collaborate with the LC and the Lighthouse team as needed via phone or email to support the 4DX implementation process.

Table 2

Monthly 4DX Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Team Member(s) Responsible</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>All certified staff</td>
<td>Half-day 4DX training (see Table 1) Personal W.I.G.s set Accountability partners established</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>System of accountability partner meetings are in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>Wednesdays – 5 minutes added to every team meeting agenda to share progress toward personal W.I.G.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Committee</td>
<td>Celebration – Small celebration planned in staff lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>All certified staff</td>
<td>Half-day 4DX training (see Table 1) Professional W.I.G.s set</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>Wednesdays – 5 minutes added to every team meeting agenda to share progress toward professional W.I.G.s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lighthouse Coordinators/Culture Club</td>
<td>Fridays – Accountability partners meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Committee</td>
<td>Scoreboard – staff scoreboard created and put on display in staff lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Celebration – Small celebration is planned in staff lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>All certified staff</td>
<td>Full-day 4DX training (see Table 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>Building-wide growth goal created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Level Teams</td>
<td>Grade-level growth goal created</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Students and teachers collaborate on a classroom growth goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>Wednesdays – progress toward W.I.G.s at team meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Club &amp; Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Fridays – Accountability partners meet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Committee</td>
<td>Celebration – First end-of-trimester celebration for all grade levels actively working toward a literacy goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**December**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom teachers</th>
<th>Students create individual learning goals that support classroom and grade level W.I.G.s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students create individual scoreboards to track individual literacy W.I.G.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
<td>Wednesdays – progress toward W.I.G.s at team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Club &amp; Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Scoreboard – Staff scoreboard updated in staff lounge; Grade-level scoreboards created and displayed in hallways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Committee &amp; Classroom Teachers</td>
<td>Celebration – Small celebration is planned for staff lounge; grade level celebration within classrooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**January**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Lighthouse Team</th>
<th>Wednesdays – progress toward W.I.G.s at team meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fridays – Accountability partners meet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Team/Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture Club &amp; Classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Celebration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture Club &amp; Classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Celebration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Building Lighthouse Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Culture Club &amp; Classroom teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Committee &amp; Classroom Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Celebration</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

The FAST assessment will be completed in the fall, winter, and spring of the 2024-2025 school year. All data will be compared to the previous three years to determine whether the 4DX goal-setting process contributed to improved literacy achievement. WIN data will show the breakdown of students receiving interventions below, at, and above their current grade levels. Furthermore, the Measurable Annual Results Assessment (MRA) survey will be completed in the spring of 2025. The building Lighthouse team will compare the change in instructional efficacy and student-led practices from the results from April 2024 to determine whether the 4DX process has been effective in improving these areas. All of these results can be used to determine changes and adjustments for the following school year.

Barriers and Challenges

Negative attitudes toward Leader in Me implementation will continue to be a barrier to this process. Some negative associations exist between the beginning of Leader in Me implementation in the fall of 2020 and the initial decline in literacy scores. The building
Lighthouse team will meet twice each month to discuss the 4DX implementation process and make adjustments as needed. Additionally, time will always be a challenge. Grundy Center has many initiatives next year. The Lighthouse Coordinators and the building Lighthouse team must address this challenge by prioritizing the time for goal celebrations during Wednesday team meetings and time with accountability partners on Friday mornings. Frequent celebrations will help staff maintain motivation as they celebrate the process.

Furthermore, many staff members have requested additional professional learning opportunities related to the Science of Reading to improve literacy instruction. Administrators must support teachers in their pursuit of goals related to literacy achievement.

**Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted literacy achievement more significantly than math achievement (Lerkkanen et al., 2023). Grundy Center Elementary School’s decline in literacy achievement from 2020-2023 is likely related to the pandemic, as Kennedy and Strietholt found similar trends in more than twenty countries (2023). Latham and Locke’s (2007) crucial finding that specific, high learning goals will compensate for a lower cognitive ability indicates that implementing the 4DX goal-setting process, and aligning individual and team goals, will allow teachers and students at Grundy Center Elementary to significantly improve literacy achievement for all students during the 2024-2025 school year.

The building-wide WIN intervention groups targeted a specific, difficult, but attainable learning goal, resulting in an increase of 19% of students decoding above grade level, an increase of 4% decoding at grade level, and a decrease of 23% of students decoding below grade level. Continuing a focus on learning and growth goals, aligning students’ individual proximal goals
with team distal goals, and tracking and celebrating success will improve literacy achievement to a higher degree.

Transitional Kindergarten students reached their highest proficiency scores since the pandemic in the winter of the current 2023-2024 school year, immediately after implementing the 4DX goal-setting process and aligning personal and team goals within the classroom. This supports Latham and Locke’s (2007) finding that high learning goals can compensate for lower cognitive ability, as TK students demonstrated the most significant literacy growth on the FAST assessment, despite all students being identified as struggling learners. Staff and students must learn together to focus on the wildly important, act on lead measures, keep a compelling scoreboard, and create a cadence of accountability. A building-wide system of aligned growth and learning goals will allow staff and students to work together to improve literacy achievement.
References


