**Setting Goals**

*Chapter Goals: After reading this chapter, you will be able to:*

* *Understand the importance of setting goals in the context of an advocacy effort*
* *Connect goal setting to measuring the success of your advocacy effort*

Part I - Why We Set Goals

It’s very likely that you have set goals in some aspect of your life. Maybe you’ve tried to run a 5K race? Or maybe you set a goal of trying to eat healthier? Goals allow us to focus our energy on making a change. They allow us to define success.

These concepts apply when you are setting goals around doing advocacy work. *Setting goals for your advocacy for school choice will allow you to:*

* **Keep you focused on what you want to achieve** - There are a number of things that need to improve about the American education system. While it would be great if you could change everything with one advocacy effort, this unfortunately isn’t the reality. Instead, if you are hyper specific about what you want to achieve in your school choice effort, you will be more likely to succeed with your advocacy. If you focus on targeting specific policies and priorities you will be more likely to make a change.
* **See if your advocacy effort was successful** - If you have clear goals for your advocacy effort then you will be able to determine if you were successful. If your goals are less clear, success will remain more ambiguous. While it’s important to be able to determine if you were successful when you achieve your goals, it’s also important to be able to measure success when you come up short. That way, when you come back for your next advocacy effort, you will be able to act more strategically.
* **Help you know what to do/what not to do** - When you set clear goals, you will be able to align your actions and strategies to those goals. With clear goals, you can do a better job of planning your advocacy efforts so they set you up to achieve those goals. With more ambiguous goals, it will be difficult to create a plan and strategy for achieving your goals. Strong goals will help ensure you have a robust strategy to achieve those goals.

In the next section, we will go over a framework for helping you set goals that will set your advocacy campaign up for success.

Part II - SMART Goals

Now that we’ve established that goal setting is an important step in leading an advocacy effort, we will walk you through a helpful framework for setting goals.

An easy way to think about quality goal setting is through the **SMART** **Goal** **Framework**. SMART standings for:

* S = Specific
* M = Measurable
* A = Achievable
* R = Relevant
* T = Timebound

Let’s go through each component of the SMART goal framework and then we will look at some examples.

* **Specific =** Your goal should be targeted and specific. If you are super clear on what you want to achieve, your goal is stronger. If your goal is ambiguous, it will be more difficult to achieve and more difficult to measure whether you achieved that goal. In the context of advocacy, name the specific law that you are trying to change or the idea that you are trying to promote.
* **Measurable** = Make sure your goal is measurable. It can be helpful to add a quantifiable component to your goal (if applicable). Instead of just saying “generate interest about a school choice issue”, we recommend framing it as “have 10,000 people sign a petition”. If your goal doesn’t have a quantitative component that is totally fine - just make sure you will be able to clearly measure success and determine if you achieve your advocacy efforts (pass a law or defeat a law are great examples because you can clearly measure this).
* **Achievable** = Setting a goal that is achievable is key. While there are a number of things that need to change about our education system, focus on something within your locus of control. It’s better to focus on something smaller and attainable, then something that is more ambitious and out of your control. Think about your position as a parent. What type of advocacy goal are you uniquely positioned to achieve?
* **Relevant** = Ensure that your goal is relevant to your effort to increase school choice and improve education for students in your community. Think about the school choice and education environment that you want to see. Will achieving your goal help you reach that goal? When considering if a goal is relevant, it’s important to do your background research. Do your best to understand the policy and political landscape in your community. Taking the time to think about how your goal is related to your vision for your education will help ensure that your hard work will lead to real change for students and families.
* **Timebound** = It’s helpful to make your goal time bound. That way, you can pick a time when you will determine whether your goal was achieved. If your goal isn’t timebound, it’s easy to just continue to do the work and not take the time to stop and adjust your strategies and actions. When you set an end date for your goal, you are giving yourself a time to pause and reflect on whether your advocacy efforts were successful and how you can adjust your actions to ensure that you achieve your goals.

Let’s look at an example of a SMART goal.

| **SMART Goal:** Securing 10,000 signatures on a petition to overturn the charter school cap in Metropolitan County before November 1st, 2022. |
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| **Specific =** The goal calls out a specific action - securing 10,000 signatures on a petition. |
| **Measurable =** There is a quantity related to this goal - 10,000 signatures. This goal names that quantity. |
| **Achievable =** This goal is definitely achievable. Thinking about your position as a parent, you can use your network of other parents, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances to get 10,000 signatures. While this requires hard work and strategic planning, this goal is achievable, considering your unique position as a parent. |
| **Relevant =** Getting ballot signatures can be a relevant and sometimes required action to make policy change. At a minimum, getting 10,000 people to sign a petition will cause lawmakers and other important stakeholders to deeply consider a public policy issue. In some communities, getting a certain number of signatures on a petition can put something on a ballot for residents to vote on (ballot initiative system). |
| **Timebound** = This goal calls out November 1st, 2022 as the time by which the 10,000 would need to be collected. It’s helpful to set this date because after November 1st, 2022, we as the leaders of this advocacy effort could reflect - did we achieve our goal? If yes, we could think about the strategies and actions that allowed us to be successful. If not, we could come up with different strategies for pursuing policy change that allows school choice to thrive. |

Following the SMART framework should help you create goals that will lead your advocacy campaign to success. We built this [Goal Framework Template](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qdTtlb6bj0vfy3Q37Qc7I_BwfemL-c5fUfibqWmvcYY/edit?usp=sharing) to help you set goals for your own advocacy campaign for school choice. The next section will help you think about aligning your goals to your values as a parent leader for school choice.

**Activity**

Use the Goal Framework Template to practice setting an advocacy goal. If you aren’t actively engaged in a current advocacy campaign for school choice, you can use fictional information for the template. Practicing the use of this framework will make it much easier to set advocacy goals when you are actively running a campaign.

**Tips and Tricks**: Especially when you are starting off, **limit the number of goals for your advocacy work (2-3 goals is a great number)**. You might have a tendency to create a number of different goals - there are a lot of things that could improve about our education system.If you set too many goals, you will get overwhelmed, and it will be difficult to fulfill any of your goals with fidelity. Instead, really focus on 2-3 goals that will drive your work. This will allow you to focus your work as an advocate on the goals that you have identified.

Part III - Aligning Goals to Values

We started this discussion in the **Relevant** section of the **SMART** goals framework, but when you set a goal you want to ensure that it will help create a school choice and education landscape that will benefit students and families.

In addition, you want to make sure that the goals of your advocacy efforts *are aligned with your values*. **Values are statements or beliefs that are important to your outlook and view of the world**. In the context of advocacy, these are the things that you want to be in place to create the education system that you want to see for your children and for the other students in your community.

Take some time to think about what your values are. Since we are focused on advocacy that advances school choice, these values should be aligned with the promotion of quality educational options for all students.

If you are struggling with thinking about your values, you can talk to other parents. Ask them a few simple questions like:

* What do you want to see in your children’s education?
* What do you think the educational landscape should look like in our community?
* What components of school choice are a priority for you and your student?
* Where do you think our school system is serving students well? Where do you think our current system is coming up short?

The goals for your advocacy efforts should reflect your values. As a parent, you are uniquely tapped into the educational policy landscape. You should use your voice to drive for the change that you want to see.

Part IV - Goals Guide You on Your Advocacy Journey

You’ve probably started to see that goal setting is an important part of any advocacy effort. Think of your goals as the **guide on your advocacy journey**.

Another helpful metaphor to understanding the importance of goal setting - think about your advocacy effort as a cross country road trip.

In this case, your goals would be **where you want to end up**. This would be the specific city or landmark where you would like your trip to end. It’s important to set a goal because you don’t want to end up in Atlanta, if you were wanting to end up in New York City. Goals allow you to ensure that you achieve what you set out to do.

Goals also allow you to select your strategies and tactics for your advocacy efforts. Think of strategy as the general approach of how you will achieve your goal. Tactics are the specific actions that you will take to ensure that your advocacy efforts are successful.

To go back to our metaphor, if goals are where you want to end up, your strategy is the path that you are going to take. Tactics would be the specific highways, rest stops, and restaurants that you choose to get to your final destination.

In the upcoming chapters, we will go more in depth about some of the strategies and tactics that you can use to achieve your advocacy goals for school choice.

*Goal setting is an essential part of any advocacy campaign. After reading this chapter, we hope that you got clarity on why goal setting is important. Additionally, we hope that the SMART goal framework was a helpful introduction around how to set quality goals for your advocacy effort.*