



GUIDE

Making goal setting actionable with HMH Personalized Path

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Introduction

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY

Goal setting is such a powerful practice that it’s a wonder people don’t do a lot more of it. We’ve all seen the difference in our own lives between drifting toward an unknown outcome and deliberately working toward a defined goal. And to better understand the mechanisms and impact of goal setting, we can simply peek behind the door of a classroom—perhaps the best laboratory we have for observing the effects of goal setting in action. Students who [pursue defined goals](#) feel more motivated, take greater ownership over their learning, and are able to observe and measure their own progress.

In education, the gap between setting a goal and achieving it often lies in the lack of an actionable, personalized learning path that gives students a clear view of where they’re going and how to get there. When teachers have the right tools to translate student goals into specific, data-driven learning experiences, goal setting becomes not only effective but potentially transformative.

This transformative potential is at the heart of [HMH® Personalized Path](#), which bridges the goal-setting gap by using [MAP® Growth™](#) data to create actionable, customized learning paths aligned to student goals. In this article, we’ll explore the power of goal setting, the perennial challenge of turning goals into meaningful action, and the critical role of Personalized Path as a technology-powered learning solution that automatically places students into just the right learning experiences to keep them working at the peak of their current ability level.

Goal setting, from hope to action

Goal setting has long attracted the attention of education researchers, who have [built an evidence base](#) for the connection between goal setting and positive academic benefits for students across a wide range of academic subject areas. In addition to greater motivation—a benefit that anyone who’s ever set a goal can relate to—academic goal setting also increases feelings of self-confidence and autonomy for students. For teachers struggling to find enough hours in the day to give students the support they need, anything that activates students’ own sense of agency and empowerment is a godsend.

Based on decades of work with teachers across the country, NWEA® has built a collection of best practices around goal setting, including the following:

- **Let students take the lead.** By centering student choice in setting goals, you can help students feel a sense of ownership over what and how they learn. And when students start to connect their own effort with improved outcomes—made more noticeable through the goal-setting practice—they really start to take control of their own learning.
- **Set goals early and often.** As early as kindergarten, students can benefit from goal setting. And by setting short-term goals and implementing regular check-ins, you create a continuous process for evaluation and modification.
- **Make goals ambitious yet achievable.** To help students achieve measurable growth—and the feeling of accomplishment that goes with it—make sure they set goals that keep them working in their own [zone of proximal development](#), or their learning “sweet spot.” Students should feel that their goals are realistic, even if they have to stretch to reach them. (For more on this, check out NWEA’s [infographic on setting growth goals](#).)
- **Leverage MAP Growth data.** With interim assessment data, you’re able to establish students’ current learning positions and use that data as the starting point for face-to-face conversations about what students know, how they feel about their learning progress, and what kinds of goals are best suited to them.



Bridging the gap with Personalized Path

With MAP Growth data showing where students are today and well-crafted goals showing where they want to be a month or two from now, Personalized Path serves as a bridge in time that students can cross with confidence. Here's how it works:

- **Data informs placement.** MAP Growth assessment data informs student placement into individualized learning pathways without the need for additional testing.
- **Tailored learning paths.** Students who need skill reinforcement can dive into adaptive practice powered by Waggle®—a gamified, personalized experience that keeps learning engaging. For those requiring intervention support, Read 180® Flex and Math 180® Flex deliver structured, tailored instruction to build foundational skills and accelerate growth.
- **Teacher control.** Automation does not mean bypassing a teacher's own judgment or sense of what their students need—quite the contrary. Personalized Path does save teachers a great deal of time and effort, but it leaves them in full control, able to override and adjust the system's placement recommendations whenever they see fit.

Real-world bridge building: Understanding volume

“If you're a middle-grade math teacher introducing the concept of volume, you might have a student who is still developing their understanding of area, or who is confusing area and perimeter. Since the concept of volume builds upon students' knowledge of area, you need to ensure your student has a foundational knowledge of area and how it is calculated so that they can relate that understanding to volume. And since multiplication is also critical to calculating volume, you'll want to get a sense of their comfort level with that, too. These are the sorts of things you'll want to keep in mind as you review your students' HMH Personalized Path learning plans and adjust them as you deem necessary. The platform places them into pathways to help shore up or expand their skills in support of their on-grade learning. Then it's up to you to apply your knowledge of your curriculum scope and sequence and what's coming next, to make sure that students are on the right path to reach their personal learning goals.”

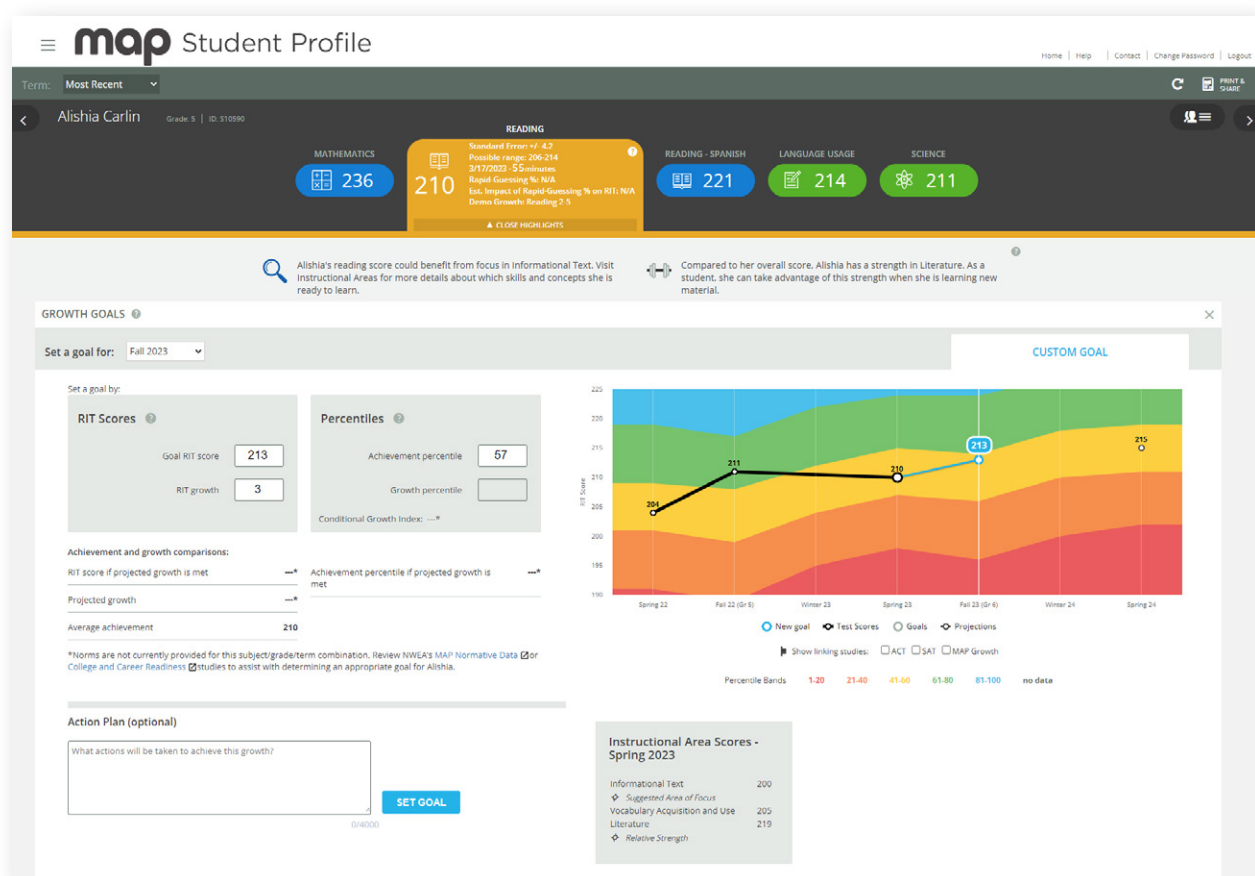
Mary Resanovich, NWEA Principal Content Designer

5 practical strategies for implementation

Goal setting may be a winning strategy, but that doesn't mean it's always easy to put into practice. In classrooms with complex and diverse learning needs, teachers often lack the time and resources to create individualized learning plans for each student. And even when goals are set, students may remain stuck in a learning gap if they don't have a clear pathway to achievement. Here are five actionable strategies for including Personalized Path in your pursuit of goal-setting success:

1. Use MAP Growth goal-setting templates alongside Personalized Path

MAP Growth offers built-in templates that give you a standardized, trackable way to set goals with your students. Review the MAP Growth Student Profile report with each student to identify their strengths and growth opportunities, then use the goal-setting templates to establish specific, content-focused goals linked to students' Personalized Path learning journeys.



2. Conduct regular check-ins and course corrections

Consistency is key. Establish a consistent schedule (e.g., weekly or biweekly) for checking in with students to review their Personalized Path progress data and invite them to engage in self-reflection (more on that below). Based on what you learn, you can adjust students' goals and pathways. For example, if students seem confused or frustrated, or if their progress data shows stagnation (or, alternatively, unexpected acceleration), you know you've got some changes to make.

With careful attention, you'll notice when there's a misalignment between a student's goals, readiness, and learning path. Whether they need more support or are ready for more challenging content, Personalized Path has a learning path to accommodate them.

3. Promote student reflection and self-monitoring

After students complete a Personalized Path session, engage with them while the experience is still fresh in their minds. Ask them what they liked, what's still confusing, and what questions they have. To help them put the Personalized Path content into a relevant context, you can use connection prompts, such as "What does this remind you of from class or other learning?"

Other useful practices for getting students to reflect on and monitor their own progress include the following:

- Help students build agency by using progress-tracking sheets to document their own advancement toward their goals.
- Encourage students to celebrate their learning milestones—and join them in these moments to underscore their importance.
- Help students understand that goals are a moving target. Regular reflection will help ensure that their goals remain relevant and their personal learning preferences are being met.
- Encourage students to advocate for different or revised goals when needed.



4. Build a reliable routine for Personalized Path work

Once you've established when you will allocate time for Personalized Path work—recommended usage is 18–20 minutes a day, 3–5 times a week—make it a consistent and reliable routine that students can count on. This will not only help students feel that Personalized Path is an integral part of their time at school but will also help you balance Personalized Path activities with other classroom instruction. With a consistent routine, you'll find it easier to set clear expectations for both the frequency and duration of goal-focused learning.

5. Nurture a school-wide goal-setting culture

When teachers and administrators share their own learning goals and progress with students, it sends a powerful message that you're all in it together. Emphasize to students that goal setting is something that all people do when they are growing and learning—in other words, it's not just a form of remediation for struggling students. Reinforce the message that having learning goals is something to be enjoyed and embraced, and be sure to celebrate progress and goal achievement across all ability levels.

It's one thing to set a learning goal—and quite another to turn aspiration into real achievement. That's a challenge that Personalized Path was designed to help solve, by seamlessly integrating MAP Growth data with individualized learning pathways while preserving the essential role of teacher judgment and student agency. When students have clear destinations, personalized routes to get there, and the support to navigate their journey, learning goals become achievable milestones.



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