Podcast: Planning for Impact – Why Goals Alone Won't Do The Job

Its that time of year when many school administrators and teacher leaders are engaged in setting school improvement goals focused on increasing student learning. But goals alone aren't enough. Real change happens when we identify and support the behaviors that lead to those goals: the consistent learning behaviors students will need to be engaged in, the teacher actions that are most likely to generate those student learning production behaviors, and the leadership actions that will support teachers in implementing those actions.

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Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.000] – Steve [Intro]
Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As

instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.850] – Steve
Planning for Impact: Why Goals alone won't do the job. As we move through the summer months, many school administrators and teacher leaders will be engaged in setting school improvement goals centered on increasing student learning. But goals alone aren't enough. Real change happens when we identify and support the behaviors that lead to those goals, the consistent learning behaviors that students need to be engaged in, and the teacher actions that are most likely to generate those student learning production behaviors, and very importantly, the leadership actions that will support teachers in implementing the teacher actions. As you listen in on this presentation that I recorded earlier, consider What are the goals that are likely to be in your school improvement plan? And how do those goals need to be defined as student, teacher, and leadership behaviors?

[00:01:45.630] – Steve
Sometime back, I had a chance to listen to a TED Talk by Reggie Rivers, a previous NFL player and now motivational speaker. And the title of his TED Talk caught my attention. It read, "If you want to achieve your goals, don't focus on them." And as Reggie pointed out, that's a a different approach than most of us are used to hearing. But boy, his points made so much sense to me. He described that it is not the focus on the goal that causes you to have it achieved. It's the focus on the behaviors. His statement, "Goals are outside of your control and behaviors are in your control." Now, this rang pretty clear to me because right around the time that I listened to this, I had been involved in working

to lose some weight. And I'll share with you that I had a goal of losing weight for a substantial amount of time, a goal that I made very little, if any, progress on. But I began working with a counselor, and I realized when I listened to Reggie's presentation, that what the counselor had done was to refocus me from the goal to a set of behaviors.

[00:03:13.530] – Steve
And the attention was on the record keeping of the meals that I ate and the calories within those meals I ate throughout the day, day to day, throughout the week. It was to set a specific behavior of exercise and then to record that I had carried out that exercise. And key to the focus of the counselor, was to stay off the scale. Matter of fact, she limited me to only getting on the scale once every three weeks. And my celebration at the end of the week was that I had executed the behaviors that I was supposed to execute. I'm guessing many of you who have looked at weight loss had had the same experience I have, and that is you carried out the appropriate behaviors for a week, and then you got on the scale and saw that there was no change in the outcome from that week of carrying out the correct behaviors. And very quickly at that point, you head out to breakfast for the grand slam, figuring your energy for the week was useless. And it dawned on me that I think the same thing frequently happens for our students. We work with students to set goals, and then we aren't engaged with the students until it's time to check back in an assessment to see whether or not the goal had been met.

[00:04:47.360] – Steve
So begin to think about as you're working with students, really valuable to have them set goals. But then how do you work with the student to translate that goal into specific behaviors. And in this case, this is where I'd plug in the term student learning production behaviors. So does a student know what is in my control? What are the behaviors that I'm going to carry out? And If I have that as my focus, then I'll

achieve my goal. I recall meeting an elementary student in a school that was focused on improving writing, and it was a thread throughout many of the things happening in the school. And the principal had pointed that out to me so that as I was visiting the classroom and I met this student, I asked him to share his writing folder with me. And the student quickly shared with me that he had a goal of moving his writing score from a 2.5 to a 3.0. And I asked the student, well, what do you have to do in order to move from a 2. 5 to a 3.0? And he quickly pointed out to me that he needed a fewer punctuation mistakes in his work, and he needed a greater, a broader, more varied vocabulary in his work.

[00:06:13.920] – Steve
And it was great that he knew that. Then I asked him, "and what will you do to make that happen?" He said, "I have no idea." In effect, he knew the outcome of a 3. 0. He even knew the outcome as to what it would look like when he got there, being fewer mistakes and greater vocabulary. But he did not have the student production behaviors to put in place to bring that about. So I looked at the student, I said, "You need some production behaviors." And he said, "I do." I said, "Yeah. I said, Let me share it with you. I'd suggest, first of all, go to your teacher and ask her for a list of all the places that commas are used. Now, put that in your in your writing folder. And when you finish a draft, pull that list out and look at the first place it says that commas are used. Do you have any examples of that? Look at the second place, the third place, the fourth place. Go down the list and check your draft for each of those elements. And I'm going to guarantee you that if you do that on each draft for a month, you're going to find that you begin to put commas in in your original draft.

[00:07:30.540] – Steve
Now, let's do the same thing. Take your draft and go to a classmate and say, read this and pick three places where you think I could use a stronger word, a richer word, a more

exciting word. And go back now and take those three words and come up with a better word to put in that spot. And maybe go to another student and ask them to do the same thing with that piece and come back and change those three words. And again, I'm going to suggest that if you do that on each draft over the next month, you'll begin to find yourself using those words in your original work. And that's what will lead to you achieving the goal." If you think about this with mathematics, many students have a sense that being good at math means that you can look at a problem and you know how to do it and can quickly do it. And the reality is that being good at math means that when you look at a problem, you have an approach to take. You have a problem solving approach. You have a set of questions that you begin to ask yourself when you look at the problem, when you read the problem, an approach to analyze the problem.

[00:08:55.260] – Steve
In addition, when you start to work on that math problem, there'll be a spot where you get stuck. Now, at that point, do you have strategies to use when you get stuck? So as a teacher, if I was going to help a student to look at building their math outcomes, what I want to do is be able to model for the student those approaches, those strategies, and again, call them student production behaviors, teach them to the student, model them to the student and then coach the student on the use of the strategies. So I put this problem in front of the student and I may ask the student at first the questions the student would be asking him or herself later. So I'm helping them to ingrain that student production behavior. When a student comes to me and says they're stuck, instead of giving them a clue for the next step, what I want to do is model the what do you do when you're stuck behaviors, and perhaps even ask the student to retell me what those behaviors are and whether or not the student has used the behaviors. So if you're looking for areas to extend, to have your students increase their learning, consider, one, having the students

set a goal to have a picture in their mind of what learning it is that they want to master, what skills they want to have, what stamina they want to develop, then go back and identify the specific learning production behaviors that the student will carry out that you believe will lead to the student reaching the outcome.

[00:10:49.490] – Steve
If you think about great performing arts instructors, if you think about great coaches, that's where their skill is. They know how to identify the production behaviors that the player, that the performer is going to spend their time on that will get them to the outcome. So you set the goal with the students, you identify the specific student production behaviors, you then develop a plan, much like my diet coach did. What's the plan for carrying out those specific behaviors? Perhaps creating a way for the student to record, much like, again, my diet coach did, record when those behaviors were carried out so that the student sees when they're missing the behaviors and become conscious of executing them. And lastly, then set up a plan for the student to reflect and to self-assess their plan and whether or not they are carrying out the plan. Now, I suggest this same structure structure, carries over to working with teachers in a PLC. Teachers in a professional learning community identify a goal that they want a group of students to reach or they want all of their students to reach. And when I'm working with a PLC like that, I take them through the backwards plan.

[00:12:21.540] – Steve
So now I've identified the learning outcome that I want my students to reach. I now step back and identify what are the student production behaviors. So what is it that kids will have to do that's going to lead to the student gaining that outcome? Only then, am I ready to identify what are the teacher behaviors that I will put in place to now assist the students in putting the student behavior in place that's going

to cause us to reach the goal. Similarly, now, as teachers, we need to set up our plan of implementation and to check that we've carried out our plan. So I've been talking to folks in PLC's lately about focusing on evidence in addition to what they usually do is focusing on data. So I find when people are focusing on data, their tendency is to look at that end of the unit measurement, that assessment that says the student achieved the goal. Much like me getting on the scale, that was my data. But more important, initially, than the data is the evidence that the plan was put into place. Did we execute the teacher behaviors we said we were going to execute?

[00:13:57.910] – Steve
Did those behaviors bring about the change in student behaviors that we were looking for? Let's collect the evidence that those things are happening before we look at the student outcome data. And frequently, when we're looking at the student outcome data, it's too late. We've come up with a plan, we've executed it for a month, and now at the end of the month, we have the first data, in effect, telling us that the plan didn't work. Or if we were focused on evidence, we'd have had evidence early on that the behaviors haven't been implemented. Kind of think this through as an example. Suppose a group of teachers in a PLC decided that they wanted to increase the richness of student content vocabulary, and through that richness of vocabulary, heighten the student's understanding of concepts. Now, imagine that the teachers looking at that decided that a student production behavior they needed was for students to spend more time explaining, clarifying, extending and supporting their thinking. In other words, they needed more student talk. Having decided that was the student production behavior, the teachers now back up and say, okay, what are the instructional behaviors that we'll take on as teachers to drive this process?

[00:15:35.360] – Steve
So the teachers might decide that they're going to have to

teach the practice of clarifying, explaining, extending, and supporting. They're going to need to model for students what that looks like and sounds like. They may decide they need to provide students with sentence starters in order to assist their practice. They may decide they need to coach students as the students begin to execute those production behaviors, remind students of using those production behaviors. Now that that plan is laid out, as teachers, we're ready to start collecting evidence. So what's the first evidence we'd want to collect is, did we execute? Did I provide the clear instruction in those areas? Can I identify the opportunities I've given students to practice these skills? Where was I able to provide students coaching and feedback on the use of the skills? Once I've been able to document that as teachers, we've implemented our part. Now I'm ready to move on. Can I gather evidence in order to document that the students are carrying out the production behaviors? Can I document there is more student voice in my classroom? Can I document that you can hear students extending and supporting their answers?

[00:17:10.340] – Steve
Can I identify which students are and which students are not? And how does that now change my teacher behavior when I recognize what I've done so far has caused some of the students to implement their behaviors, but not others? Only after I've got all that evidence laid out, am I now ready to look for the changes in student learning outcome. Only now am I ready to look at a end of a unit assessment and see that the richness of students' vocabulary and their understanding of concepts has increased. As you lay this out, begin to plan for yourself and for your students' celebration of execution. Meaning, I'm going to celebrate the fact that I implemented and carried out the behaviors. I'm going to celebrate that I can document my persistence in staying with the plan. That's the initial things to celebrate. If you do that, when you reach that final goal, when you step on the scale and it gives you the message you want, the good news is that that outcome

now reinforces your belief and your value of perseverance, and that’s what drives you to continue persevering.

[00:18:36.020] – Steve
As your goals develop, look beyond the outcomes and explore the behaviors that can get you there. What should students be doing more consistently to achieve the learning outcomes you seek? What teacher behaviors support those student actions? And in your leadership role, how do you support those teacher actions? It’s critical to gather evidence along the way. First, evidence on the behaviors and then on the outcomes. Are the leadership behaviors generating the desired teacher actions. If those teacher actions aren’t present, leadership behaviors need to adjust. Are the teacher behaviors generating the desired student behaviors? If not, teachers will need to change. Are the student behaviors beginning to indicate learning changes? If not, we may need to consider modifications in the entire plan. The evidence you collect around observable behavior changes guide conscious actions toward achieving the goals. By focusing on behaviors, we move from intention to implementation. And that is where growth lives. Thanks for listening. Feel free to contact me if you’d like a reflection partner as you work through your goals. I’m always available at barkleypd.com.

[00:20:22.660] – Steve [Outro]
Thanks for listening, folks. I’d love to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barclay, or send me questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.