

Focus on Growth Committee

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Denver Jewish Day School Focus on Growth: Differentiation through Student Goal Setting

The Focus on Growth initiative in the Lower Division at Denver JDS is a program for engaging our students in their individual learning and growth while celebrating student success in a variety of areas. Differentiation is a key component to learning in Denver JDS classrooms, and this program encourages students and teachers to work together to set differentiated personal goals, monitor progress, and celebrate achievement. This is a division-wide initiative, spanning grades K-5 across our curriculum.

This program acknowledges and celebrates individual student academic growth as well as social-emotional and personal growth. This may be a celebration of academic achievement, for instance when a fifth grader who struggled with multiplying and dividing fractions finally “gets it,” or a second grader who, after months of hard work and perseverance, finally learns to write all of her cursive Hebrew letters. It could be a celebration of social growth for a student who is able to independently solve a conflict with a peer. It may even be a kindergartener, proud of his own personal growth who at some point during the year is able to tie his own shoes or carry his own backpack into school.

As part of this program, all students engage in a collaborative goal setting process with their teachers. Throughout the school year, teachers monitor progress on these goals and acknowledge goal attainment. As goals are accomplished, new goals are set so that students are constantly challenged at their own personal levels. During the school year, students have the opportunity to reflect back on their achieved goals and select one or two goals (depending on grade level) to celebrate publicly with the entire Lower Division school community. For these selected accomplishments, students complete a gold leaf to add to our Tree of Growth in the LD main hallway with their name and the goal they achieved.

A final component of the program is our end of year celebration during Kabbalat Shabbat. This event previously included an awards ceremony in which some students received academic or growth awards, as well as other end of the year awards. Through the Focus on Growth initiative, we now celebrate ALL students’ learning with a slide show including the Tree of Growth photographs from throughout the school year.

After last year’s implementation, we found that our youngest students, kindergarten and first grade, had more difficulty with the goal setting process than our older students. This year, we have modified the expectations for those grades to allow for additional scaffolding for those students. They have begun the year with setting some classwide goals and then moved toward setting individual student goals as the year progresses. We also have found that setting clear expectations and a timeline helps all teachers stay on track with goal meetings and check-ins with students throughout the school year.

This initiative has truly benefited our students. Teachers and students are now encouraged to more regularly reflect on their learning, set goals that are specifically differentiated toward each child's academic and social-emotional needs, and celebrate different areas of student growth and achievement. Students are taking greater ownership over their learning process, and we often hear children speaking about their goals. They discuss what they want to accomplish in a variety of school settings. This has also been a wonderful way for students and teachers to communicate with parents about children's learning throughout the school year. The pride that children show when selecting their gold leaves and hanging them on the tree to celebrate their accomplishments is priceless. We love seeing them proudly walk their parents over to the Tree of Growth to show off their leaves.

General Expectations

- All students will engage in a collaborative goal setting process with their teachers
- All goals should be school related
- Goals may be academic, social-emotional, or personal
- All students should have a minimum of three goals toward which they are working at any given time during the school year
- Older students should have goals in each of the core curricular areas over the course of the year
- Kindergarten and first grade students may start the year with classroom goals and move toward individual goals as the year progresses.

Goal Setting Timeline

August - Select Focus on Growth documents for your grade level and create a team plan for goal setting, progress monitoring, and reflection time with students

August and September - Begin setting goals with students

By November Conferences - Have goal information ready for teachers/students to share at conferences

Ongoing - As students accomplish goals, create new ones to work toward

By January - Have students choose a first semester goal to celebrate on the Tree of Growth - take pictures of all students hanging their leaves (small groups of 3-5 is preferred)

By February - All kindergarten and first grade students should be working on individual goals by this point in the year

By March Conferences - Have goal information ready for teachers/students to share at conferences

By Early May - Have students choose a second semester goal to celebrate on the Tree of Growth - take pictures of all students hanging their leaves (small groups of 3-5 is preferred)

Late May - As part of our last Kabbalat Shabbat of the school year, all students and their accomplishments are celebrated in a retrospective video of the school year

Supplemental files:

- When working with students, teachers use a goal worksheet. [Here](#) and [here](#) are samples of some of the worksheets different teachers have used with their students.
- [Here](#) is a picture of our Tree of Growth as well as the sign that is posted on the tree with an explanation. This tree was a collaborative art installation that students worked on with our art teacher. All students helped create the decoupage collage art that became the tree's permanent leaves. A fifth grader's design for the trunk was selected from various submissions.
- [Here](#) is a video that shows pictures of our Focus on Growth End of the Year Celebration.