

# I.S. 229 Roland Patterson: Goal Setting and Strategic Thinking



**A Case Study on the 2013–14 Academic and Personal Behaviors Pilot**

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**Funded by:**

New York City Department of Education  
Office of Postsecondary Readiness

October 2014



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## An Introduction to Academic and Personal Behaviors

According to a growing body of research spanning more than four decades, students' beliefs about whether effort leads to success have a dramatic influence on their success in school. In some sense, this notion of "growth mindset" runs contrary to the messages that are implicitly communicated to students through grades and test scores. These often send the message that intelligence can be measured in fixed numbers by which a student may be labeled, for example, a "Level One" or a "Level Four." In fact, "the most motivated and resilient students are not the ones who think they have a lot of fixed or innate intelligence," according to Carol Dweck, a leading researcher in the study of growth mindset. "Instead, the most motivated and resilient students are the ones who believe that their abilities can be developed through their effort and learning."<sup>1</sup>

In the 2013–14 school year, four New York City middle schools and six New York City high schools took part in the Academic and Personal Behaviors Pilot. Led by the NYC Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Readiness in partnership with Eskolta School Research and Design, Inc., this project asked schools to reshape how they give feedback to students in order to support the development of growth mindsets and thereby promote persistence.

The project launched in October with a presentation by Dr. David Yeager of the University of Texas at Austin, a leader in the field, sharing the latest research highlighting the successes of growth-mindset interventions in increasing student motivation. Teachers participating in the pilot had the opportunity to attend a series of monthly development seminars, in which they heard from scholars and practitioners about mindset theory and practice. Teachers in this case study used various resources and ideas from David Yeager and from Mindset Works, an organization cofounded by Carol Dweck (see Materials Cited on p.1).

Schools in the pilot also received support from a team at Eskolta or from a facilitator at the Department of Education, who in turn received coaching from Eskolta. In a series of in-school sessions held over the course of the year, these facilitators supported teachers in an inquiry process as they designed, reviewed, and refined their implementation of growth-mindset practices based on their own experience and data on the impact on students. By the end of the 2013–14 school year, participating teachers made plans with their facilitators and their principals to share their work and learning with their colleagues in order to encourage broader adoption of growth-mindset language and practices in the 2014–15 year.

This case study offers examples and insights from pilot work as it was carried out in practice. I.S. 229 Roland Patterson, on which this case study is based, is a middle school located in the Morris Heights neighborhood of the Bronx. The school enrolls approximately 200 students, in grades six through eight. Twenty-two percent of students at the school are English Language Learners (ELL), 34 percent are students with special needs, and 88 percent qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Out of 160 of the school's parents surveyed in 2013, 95 percent agree or strongly agree that I.S. 229 has high expectations for their children. The school's classrooms-without-walls model at times creates challenges in terms of student focus, yet it also promotes transparency in terms of teachers' demonstration of practice. Student names have been changed to protect privacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Dweck, C., "Boosting Achievement with Messages that Motivate," *Education Canada*, Vol. 47 (2) (2007).

## Materials Cited

During the pilot, Diane Jenkins, the teacher on whom this study is based, developed her own resources and used materials from Mindset Works' online EducatorKit ([www.mindsetworks.com](http://www.mindsetworks.com)). Materials cited in this study include:

- *ELA Goal-Setting Sheet* (see Appendix A)
- *Goal Achievement Rubric* (see Appendix B)
- Mindset Works' Mindsets & Motivation course video: *Introduction – Mindsets and Motivation*
- Mindset Works' Mindsets & Motivation course activity: *The Malleable Mind: You Can Grow Your Intelligence*
- Mindset Works' Mindsets & Motivation resource: *Growth Mindset Feedback and Framing tools*

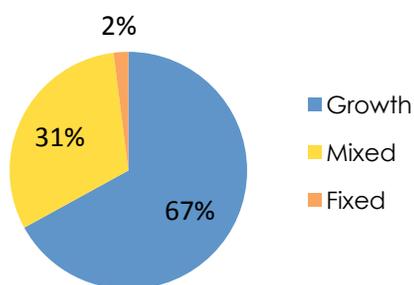
## Introduction: Developing a Growth Mindset

At the beginning of the school year, John was “intimidated by his peers” and reluctant to speak during class discussion, according to his English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, Diane Jenkins. He believed, according to his answers on a survey, that intelligence doesn't change: you are smart or you are not. By the year's end, John had changed. He was participating vocally in class, and he appeared to feel comfortable offering an answer even when he knew he might need help completing his point. His behavior, along with his responses on the same survey given at the end of the year, showed a changed set of beliefs. Now he thought that his effort could actually change his intelligence.

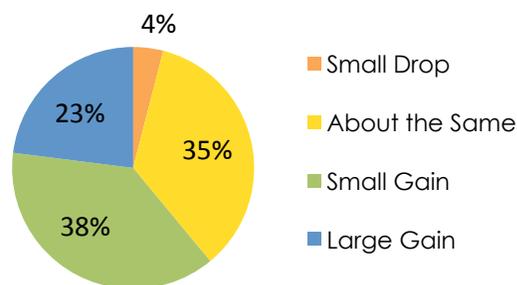
Vanessa was largely unlike John. She started out the year viewing herself as “top performer” and would sometimes speak condescendingly to classmates, whom she viewed as beneath her. Like John, though, her behavior appeared driven by a belief that intelligence is fixed. Also like John, by the end of the year, Vanessa too was saying that intelligence is not a fixed trait but rather a malleable one. Her behavior reflected her change of mindset: instead of criticizing peers who struggled, she actively helped them, as if she now recognized that she could contribute to others' learning.

In fact, in Diane's class of 26 students, all but two were exhibiting a growth mindset (the perspective that intelligence can grow through effort), as opposed to a fixed mindset (the view that intelligence is essentially static) by the end of a year of her work with them. Furthermore, students who had shown this belief in their ability to grow also shared demonstrable growth in writing skills—exactly what they were learning in Diane's class—according to the class's official state-mandated pre- and post-assessments.

**Academic Mindsets  
(Spring, n = 51)**



**Change in Academic Mindset  
(Fall to Spring, n = 26)**



The change was perhaps most visible in the way students responded to feedback on assignments.

“I’ve seen them go from getting a paper back and being **crushed** to being **curious** to see what area they need to grow in and finding out what strategies they need to use to do it.”

“I’ve seen them go from getting a paper back and being crushed” by the extensive comments “to being curious to see what area they need to grow in and finding out what strategies they need to use to do it,” Diane said.

The section that follows uses the example of Diane’s work with John to outline the key steps in her pilot work.

## A Conferring Process Rooted in Goal Setting and Strategies

### *Initiating the Conferring and Goal-Setting Process*

In December of 2013 Diane used a Mindset Works video and reading activity to introduce the concept of malleable intelligence (the idea that intelligence can be grown through effort) to her class. While at first the idea that one has control over much of the growth of one’s brain seemed foreign to many of her students, Diane found that discussing this topic with her students was critical for encouraging them to buy into the approach to learning that underlay the subsequent steps of her pilot work.

Soon after her lesson on malleable intelligence, Diane let her students know that as they built their own skills and intelligence throughout the year, an important component of their work would be one-on-one, teacher-student conferences on goal setting and follow-through related to work on writing. Diane explained that these conferences would give the students a chance to repeatedly check in on progress toward their goals in an ongoing cycle of learning.

In order to make time during class to hold one-on-one conferences, Diane developed strategies for ensuring that students not currently conferencing were engaged in productive work throughout conference sessions. For instance, she provided more than enough activities for her class to complete during conferences, and she assigned student subject matter “experts” to help answer their peers’ questions.

During the initial conferences, which took place in January, Diane rooted discussions with students in a first draft of a piece of writing. Together, she and each student reviewed the writing, identified areas of strength, discussed possible goals for further work, and chose a relevant goal from a *Goal-Setting Sheet* (Appendix A), which lists five goal options (according to the assignment) and a place for students to create an unlisted goal. Diane and each student also discussed possible strategies to meet the student’s identified goal, and students selected strategies they would use and, following the conference, independently filled in reasons for goal and strategy choices on the *Goal-Setting Sheet*. The process made strategic thinking about writing explicit for students; it allowed them to see specific steps to success on their drafts rather than an objective alone that, for many, would seem daunting to meet.

Yet for John, one of Diane’s students with special needs, the very process of conferring and goal setting at first seemed bewildering and unnatural. He often struggled to bring approaches learned in one setting (such as a conversation about goals) into another (such as a work session on that goal), which made the process particularly challenging for him. In Diane’s words, “For him to identify something specific that he

was going to work on and to identify strategies he was going to use, that was a very foreign concept to him.”

However, Diane had designed her conferring process to facilitate students’ progress from identification of strategies to follow-through on using strategies: after initial conferences, she held follow-up conferences to discuss progress toward their goals on the writing assignment, challenges they had encountered, and whether the identified strategies were indeed used. From there, students recorded key points on their own progress, challenges, and strategies for future improvement on the second portion of the *Goal-Setting Sheet* while Diane assessed each student using the Goal Achievement Rubric.

It was in the first follow-up conference that Diane saw that the key aims of the conferring process were becoming clearer to John. With Diane’s guidance, he began to look more closely at his work, identify a relevant goal for future work, and choose strategies to use in meeting that goal.

Yet for John and many of his peers, it would take more rounds of conferring for them to see the improvement on writing that they sought. After the first two one-on-one conferences (an initial and a follow-up), Diane found—anecdotally and in reviewing her students’ scores on the Goal Achievement Rubric (Appendix B), which rates students’ goal setting, identification of strategies, and follow-through—that while her students were generally able to set specific and relevant goals as a component of the conferring process, they struggled to identify and follow through on strategies to help them achieve their goals. In short, the question for Diane became: How to help students follow through on their strategies and achieve their writing goals?

### *Analyzing the Process, Supporting Students Beyond Conferences*

In the second round of conferences, Diane video recorded herself, which let her closely review whether she was providing feedback that encouraged the growth mindset or the fixed mindset. After seeing one early video recording, she noted: “A lot of the growth mindset phrases come at the beginning when I’m framing the conversation, but when I’m caught up in the actual dialogue, I’m going back to the fixed phrases (e.g., ‘This is good’).” But through this analysis and repeated practice during conferences, she began to use growth-mindset-promoting language consistently and naturally. She saw that this helped make the conferring process more authentic for students and more effective in terms of motivating their follow-through.

A second key factor supporting students’ improvement on writing was discussion in conferences that referred back to students’ previously set goals and chosen strategies. For instance, despite an increased ability to identify useful strategies, by John’s third conference his score on his writing still had not

During conferences, Diane used the ***Growth Mindset Feedback and Framing*** language tools designed by Dr. Carol Dweck’s Mindset Works program. The resources provide dozens of “growth-minded” phrases (e.g., **“Mistakes are welcome here!”** **“Here are some strategies to figure this out,”** and **“All that hard work and effort paid off!”**), which are organized according to several different situations (e.g., when a student **struggles despite strong effort, needs strategy help, or succeeds with strong effort**). Diane was able to prepare phrases to use for each conference by referring to the category that best suited each student.

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improved. Looking at his drafts, Diane saw no evidence that he was actually using the strategies he had identified previously (e.g., to draw from a list of sentence starters for transitions in writing). But having John's strategy choices and writing side by side offered Diane an opening. She decided to challenge him gently:

"John, in our last conference I was really impressed that you picked a goal that is a big area of growth for you, and you identified relevant strategies to use in the future. Now, when I'm looking at your work—where did you use these strategies?"

John was slightly embarrassed. He didn't have an answer.

"You know, this is OK," Diane continued. "This is a learning opportunity. When you were doing the work, did you use those strategies? Or maybe you forgot?"

John was ready to reply. "Oh yeah," he began, "you know, I should have, but I didn't."

"OK, this is the beginning of us in this process, Diane replied, "and you're only going to see a difference in the work if you actually use the strategies. So this is what I want you to do: the next time that we're setting goals and strategies, I want you to use this as your reference for what strategies you should be using on a regular basis to work on this skill."

The conversation was a turning point for John and Diane alike. They were both fully aware—and aware that each other was aware—of what John needed to do to improve his work.

For Diane, a critical step after each conference was to make sure that she supported students according to their individual needs—just as she did with John. Often this support took the form of repeated reminders to apply the strategies they had identified (e.g., brief handwritten notes saying "Remember your sentence starters!" and comments made in passing during independent work time). She also had students generate their own ideas for strategies and posted them in the classroom. She found that reminders to use strategies made students' use of strategies far more consistent and that students felt more ownership over strategy choices when they themselves had identified useful strategy options.

In John's case, since he tended to get embarrassed and "shut down" if he received extensive verbal feedback in front of other students, Diane made sure to connect with him through brief one-on-one exchanges that referred to the strategies they had discussed. During in-class writing sessions, Diane would pass his desk and remind him to take out his *Goal-Setting Sheet*. If he was using the strategies he had identified, she would acknowledge his effort by saying, "Oh, I see you're using the strategies," or "I see you're on top of it." Diane said that "for him it took a couple rounds of conferring to see that we're not just putting things down on paper, that we're not just saying we're going to do this" but that, instead, the *Goal-Setting Sheet* is something that he should be using as an active reminder of what strategies he should employ.

By his final conference in the spring, John was eager to share with Diane what he had done to improve his writing. He pointed to using a writing strategies handout and to putting strategy reminders in the margins of his written responses. Diane noted that "he was very excited to give me specific examples of what he had done because he was taking pride in improving and growing."

“As we got further along in the process, when we started seeing a little bit of growth in his writing,” Diane explained, “I asked him, ‘How do you think you improved? What did you do to improve?’ and he said, ‘You know, I used the strategies.’ So I think for him it took a little bit of time to see that connection between what we discuss in the conference, what you walk away from the conference with, the implementation of that, and then actually seeing the result in your scores, in your performance, and in your comfort level with the different skills you’re working on.”

### Background on the Pilot Team

Through the Academic and Personal Behaviors Pilot, second-year sixth-grade ELA teacher Diane Jenkins collaborated with twelfth-year ELL and Theater teacher Hugh Fletcher; the school’s principal, Dr. Ezra Matthias; and Alicia Wolcott, a senior school developer from Eskolta School Research and Design, Inc., to design and test approaches to promoting positive academic mindsets and behaviors. After initial meetings in the fall, during which the team discussed possible focus areas for pilot work, Diane quickly identified that one-on-one conferences with students would offer a much-needed venue for attention to her students’ writing. She had tried one-on-one conferences in the past, and she knew that it was a process that would be worthwhile for her students, but it was also an area of her practice that she knew that she needed to develop. As she put it: “I could tell the students what areas of their writing they needed to improve, but I was really looking for some kind of system or framework for it.” She wanted to make sure that she was, in her words, “prepared and knowledgeable about not just what feedback to give but how to give it in a way that doesn’t overwhelm a sixth grader and doesn’t have them leaving that meeting feeling like everything went wrong.” Diane saw conferences as an ideal place to employ the growth-mindset-promoting feedback that would be pivotal to her students’ effort and achievement.

At the end of the school year, the I.S. 229 pilot team decided to expand the pilot work in 2014–15 to a five-teacher team led by Diane and devoted to incorporating growth-mindset-promoting language into their feedback to students as well as to designing and testing new strategies and tools for fostering positive academic behaviors in students. A key goal of this team will be to gather lessons from their work to share with the full faculty to plan for work on academic behaviors in the 2015–16 school year.



## Goal Achievement Rubric

	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Emerging</b>	<b>Starting</b>
<b>Setting Goals</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>sets goals</b> that are <b>specific, important, and realistic</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/> Student sets goals, but they may be <b>nonspecific, unrealistic, or not especially important</b> .	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>does not</b> set goals.
<b>Identifying Strategies</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>identifies useful strategies</b> to help them meet their goals.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>identifies some strategies</b> to help them meet their goals, but the strategies are not always useful.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>does not</b> identify useful strategies to help them achieve their goals.
<b>Following Through</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>uses strategies</b> to achieve goals. <input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>persists</b> until goals are achieved, even in the face of challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>sometimes uses strategies</b> , but sometimes gets off track. <input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>tries until he or she encounters a major challenge</b> , but then gives up or gets off track.	<input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>does not use strategies</b> to achieve goals. <input type="checkbox"/> Student <b>gives up</b> when encountered with a major challenge.