

# Think S.M.A.R.T.

By: Ruby Tozzi

Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Relevant. Time-bound. These are the components of the third quarter S.M.A.R.T Goals that are to be completed by the senior Perry Service Learning class students each year. PSL is a full-year course at Perry High School, located outside of the typical school building in Manchester West, that allows students to gain social awareness, a service mindset, and get their heads out of small-town Perry. By the second semester of the course, students have developed many skills that they are in turn asked to contribute in some sort of creative initiative to benefit their service site. There is an extreme learning curve in the first semester that allows students to not only grow to understand service generally, but they come to understand the specific needs of their volunteer position. The goal of the first semester is to come to understanding thorough enough to lead and volunteer without being exclusively instructed by the supervisor. In the second semester, all of the work pays off and allows students to use their ingenuity to come up with a profitable ploy to advance their location socially, economically, or morally.

Teachers Allison Trentanelli and Mark Soeder were asked to create S.M.A.R.T. goals regarding their work in the classroom by their superiors on the school board. After they fulfilled what was asked of them, they reflected on the success of the goals that they planned so thoroughly and decided that this method was something that their students and program partners/affiliates could greatly benefit from. For roughly five years now, Trentanelli and Soeder have been assigning this project to their students and have found it to be a great success. Mr. Soeder believes that he knows why the projects have been such a hit and why students feel significantly less animosity toward the work they are asked to put in. He says, “January is the

perfect time because we're refreshed, we're renewed from Christmas break, we've got a little bit of energy, and, for most people, they actually care deeply about the people that they serve and they want to do something to help." Now, doing "something to help" does not mean that every student's project has to be a large-scale event or thousand-dollar fundraiser. This, of course, is a very unrealistic expectation based on the sheer variety of differences between each student, their schedule, the regulations of their volunteer site, and even the needs of their site. The primary component that PSL looks for in terms of goals is a creative and well-planned approach to giving back and making a positive impact.

This exact creativity and time-based planning is what makes this project so worthwhile to the teachers of PSL. Not only is it an opportunity for the students to showcase the skills they have developed throughout the first half of their senior year, but it is also an opportunity for them to master the necessary skills to project manage, instead of observing others as they do so. On this matter, Trentanelli confers with the idea of throwing students into mandatory leadership and giving them the power to ask questions is what causes them to keep using the same project; "In school, we don't always give you those opportunities to be a project manager. Teachers manage projects, administrators manage projects, in your extracurriculars even--we manage projects. We don't often give students the opportunity to practice [that]." Every student regardless of success has the opportunity to reflect on their project and experience growth in their networking and communication skillset. The primary factor that allows students to experience unbridled growth through this activity is the freedom that is given. When asked to what degree the teachers of PSL have their hands "on" the event planning, Trentanelli distinctly states, "I think it's very hands-off. At most I will order the event's supplies or provide students with gentle nudges or

progress check-ins.” That degree of independence permits students to utilize levels of maturity and challenge themselves.

Though the idea of a S.M.A.R.T. goal is extremely developed, even defined in its own name, the application to the curriculum of PSL is not yet flawless. Roughly five years ago they began to play with the idea of S.M.A.R.T. goals. As new barriers and obstacles came up, they intentionally put new guidelines in place to prevent issues from furthering or advancing into upcoming school years. For example, each student has to incorporate five volunteers into their goal plan to prevent students from taking a low-impact project that doesn’t show how much they care about the work that they are doing. Though it is not the final project of the course, the S.M.A.R.T. goal unit of PSL is one of the most momentous ways that students illustrate their advancement.