

Taking Charge of Their Future: Inviting Students to Think Big and Plan Now!

You can be anything you want to be! That’s what I tell the kids I work with in my district and youth groups I speak to as a presenter. One of our most important jobs as educators is to help students capture their dreams and put them into a plan—even if those dreams aren’t fully formed at their young age. Visualizing goals and mapping out a plan encourages our students to

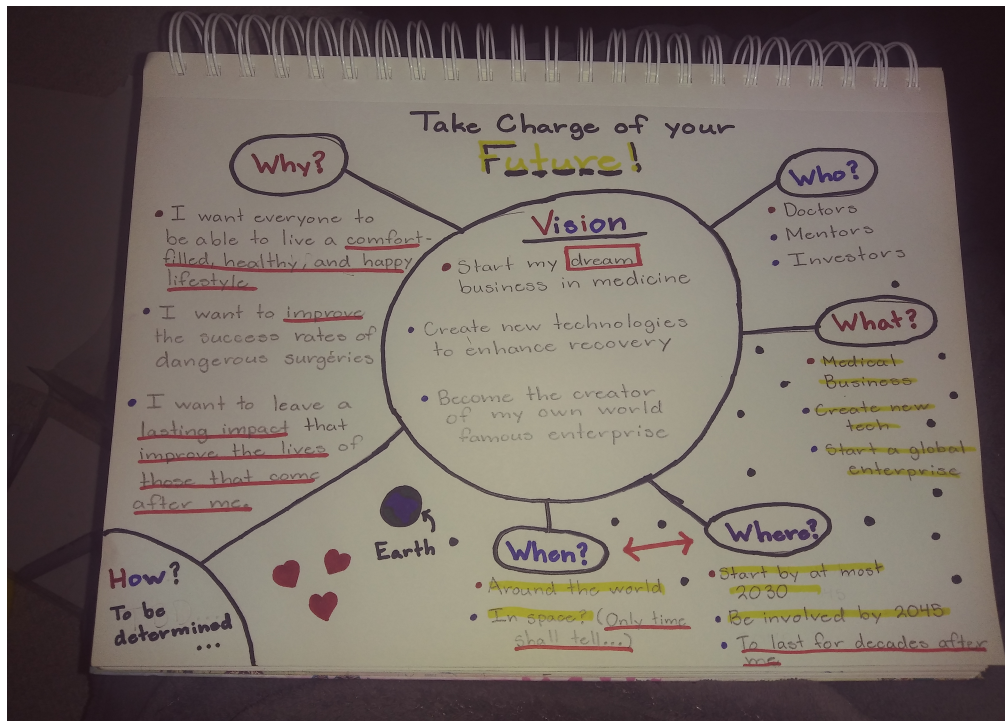
- **Articulate their hopes and dreams.** When we share our hopes and dreams with others, they become more concrete and actionable. Students who set goals have a clearer picture of their engagement in the world—from there, they can make plans to achieve those goals.
- **Claim a unique space in the classroom community.** Encouraging all kids to articulate big dreams creates a respectful and supportive community, which helps each student shape his or her identity as valued member of the class.
- **Look to us to help them expand their vision.** When we know a student has a dream of becoming a marine biologist or a chess master, for example, we can solicit resources from colleagues, community members, and local business leaders to give students more to chew on: What does a day doing my dream job look like? Who or what groups could I learn from?

Here are some ways to help students start setting goals and planning for the future:

If your students have access to a device:

- Prerecord or livestream a lesson. Start with a short pep talk on creating your dream future: You might ask, “What are one or two exciting careers you dream of doing when you grow up?” “What exciting way do you want to live when you grow up?” “Is there anyone you know or have seen who is doing something or living a life that fascinates you?”
- If you’re livestreaming, invite a few students to share their ideas.
- At this point, you can show students the short video I made of this lesson here: <https://sway.office.com/nviKXEyL7SuHtXHp>. Or do the lesson yourself following these steps:
 - Tell students that a first step in making their dream a reality is to create a plan—and then put that plan into action. You might give them an example of a career or life goal you’re working on and show them how you’re making that goal concrete by making a plan.
 - Model filling out the My Plan organizer, thinking aloud as you go.

- What: What’s my goal or vision? What career might help me reach that goal or realize that vision?
 - Who: Who is involved in that career or what groups might I work with?
 - When: How often will I do job or when do I think I might start?
 - Where: Where might I do my dream work?
 - Why: What motivates or excites me about this work?
 - How: (Encourage students to leave this part blank for now and fill it in as they take their journey to the dream work.)
- Generate ideas for decorating the plan and posting it in a place where students will see it and be reminded of it every day (e.g., their bedroom door or the door of the refrigerator). In the example below, a student with the dream of being a medical engineer has designed her My Plan as a diagram with color-highlighted phrases and features.
 - Give students time to copy the What, Who, When, Where, Why, and How prompts in a journal or on a clean sheet of paper and send them off to start their plans!
- Invite them to share their My Plan work on your shared learning platform to delight and inspire their classmates.



- Make note of follow-ups you might do to keep each child learning more about his or her vision for the future.

If your students have limited or no online access:

If you are creating packets of materials to send home, consider including your model My Plan with notes encouraging students, while they are at home, to dream big about their future! Invite them to write down their dream work so they can remind themselves of it every day. Base your tips on the lesson ideas above, and emphasize the importance of decorating the plan and posting it in a place they will see it every day.

Extension: Watch more of Dr. Sanderlin generating ideas for Possibility Boards at <https://vimeo.com/404766445/8a4bce8724> (12:05–24:22). Here, with the help of her son, Scott, she demonstrates a way to help students generate goals and plans based on their favorite items and icons, and meaningful words and phrases. Below, a student captures many of his current interests related to the ocean, travel, and music, and even lists ideas for career paths.

