

Richard Woods, Georgia's School Superintendent
"Educating Georgia's Future"

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As Measures of Educator Effectiveness

**A Guide for
Principals**

What is an SLO?

A Student Learning Objective (SLO) is a measurable, academic goal informed by available data that districts set for teachers and students. District-determined SLOs are content-specific, grade level learning objectives that are measurable, focused on growth in student learning, and aligned to curriculum standards. SLOs are one component of Georgia's Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) which is a multi-dimensional approach to teacher evaluation. SLOs are also a component of the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), a multi-dimensional approach to leader evaluation. In addition, SLOs are required, recommended, or identified as an example of student growth in nearly half of the United States (Lachlan-Hache, Cushing, Bivona, 2012, p.1).

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What is the purpose of SLOs?

The primary purpose of SLOs is to improve student growth in every classroom. An equally important purpose of SLOs is to provide evidence of each teacher's instructional impact on student learning in non-tested areas. SLOs give educators, school systems, and state leaders an additional means by which to understand, value, and recognize each teacher's effectiveness in classrooms.

SLOs improve teacher practice

The SLO process improves teaching practice by ensuring that educators:

- ✓ Have an in-depth understanding of course standards
- ✓ Know what subject content and skills each student has at the beginning of the course
- ✓ Set goals for students
- ✓ Monitor student progress
- ✓ Examine outcomes to determine next steps

SLOs improve schools

The SLO process focuses on increasing student growth in non-tested course in Georgia schools. Throughout the tenure of "No Child Left Behind" legislation, local school leaders have closely analyzed the data from tested courses and orchestrated teaching talent, resources, and schedules to the benefit of their students in these tested subjects. Now school leaders have a common measure to monitor the effectiveness of teachers of non-tested subjects and their abilities to impact student growth over a course's instructional duration, providing a perspective that leaders have not had in many non-tested courses.

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SLOs link accountability and support in order to improve student achievement. They work in tandem with classroom observations to more accurately understand learning and teachers' contributions to that learning. They enable teachers, in collaboration with principals, to assess their strengths and weaknesses, such as analyzing data or linking instruction to standards. Those insights then allow for specifically tailored professional development to meet those needs, improve instruction, and ultimately, bolster learning (Slotnick & McRobbie, 2012).

The SLO process, with strong and explicit leadership, can increase student growth in numerous ways.

The SLO process:

- Is an integral part of local school improvement plan.
- Helps teachers link teacher practice to student learning.
- Reinforces effective teaching practices.
- Is a process for helping teachers to improve their practice.
- Provides evidence for multiple Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS).
 - For example, in SLO conferences as principals and teachers discuss baseline data, instructional strategies, and individual student needs, TAPS for professional planning, instructional strategies, and assessment purposes can be addressed.
- Allows for rich collaboration/planning opportunities for grade level and department teams.
- Provides a venue for teachers to implement professional learning and leaders to monitor professional learning.
- Is supported by professional learning communities and/or data teams.
- Is used to improve the ability of course teachers to design or provide feedback on increasingly valid and reliable measures of student learning.
- Is another methodology to improve teacher effectiveness utilizing teacher reflection and professional development.

To the extent that objectives, school plans, and standards and goals are mutually reinforcing, the implementation of all three will be strengthened and there will be greater clarity of purpose (CTAC, 2004).

The research indicates...

The January 2004 study of Denver Public Schools Pay for Performance pilot which used SLOs found higher mean student achievement resulting from high quality SLOs at all three academic levels, elementary, middle, and high school. Student achievement was measured by two independent measures: The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). Another impact of the SLO process in Denver was that student achievement rose as the length of teacher participation with SLOs increased.

Perceptions of participants and other parties in the Denver study included:

- The pilot significantly increased the school and district focus on student achievement. This focus increased with each succeeding year of pilot implementation.
- Teachers indicated they have greater access to student achievement data and that they use the data more effectively, particularly baseline data, to establish growth expectations, and to focus earlier on students who need more assistance and to monitor progress (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2004).

In Denver, students whose teachers crafted high quality SLOs showed more than a year's worth of gain on the Colorado Assessment Program and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills during each year of the study at all three school levels.

A study conducted in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools found a strong correlation between targeted objectives and student achievement in North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests during the first phase of implementation. In addition, the performance of pilot schools exceeded that of the match schools on these same tests.

Qualitative data analyses conducted in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg study revealed a number of factors supporting teacher effectiveness, notably including principal effectiveness.

Participating teachers also became more systematic and strategic in making instructional decisions based on student performance and growth (Community Training Assistance Center, 2012).

Leader Keys Effectiveness System and SLOs

Achievement of SLO learning targets, as an indicator of student growth in non-tested courses, is a component of the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES). As leaders plan for their LKES documentation of practice, alignment with and incorporation of the SLO process will provide a cohesive approach to school improvement.

The SLO process can also provide evidence of effective implementation of several of the Leader Assessment on Performance Standards (LAPS) and the leader's performance goals. LKES evaluators will review and discuss the SLO process as well as SLO attainment data with their evaluators at the mid-year and end-of-year conference.

How are SLOs developed?

1. Districts, in collaboration with teachers and school leaders, examine current data and historical data to determine the focus of the SLO for specified courses. Overarching standards are selected for the SLO.
2. A method for measuring student academic growth on selected standards is either procured or developed by the district. Assessments are selected to determine student knowledge of content/skills at the beginning and end of the course. The pre and post assessments do not have to be the same but should measure the same standards.
3. Based on student pre-assessment scores and/or other results, district teams set growth targets for each student.
4. The SLO statement itself includes the duration of the instruction period, the focus of student learning, how growth will be measured, and specific growth targets which reflect each student's target for expected and high growth.
5. The District SLO Statement form, which includes all of the information stated in 1-4 above and other pertinent details, is completed and submitted to the GaDOE for audit and approval.
6. Districts share SLOs with course teachers. Teachers dovetail SLO components with their curriculum, instruction, and collaboration with colleagues and school leaders.

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An SLO Statement Example

Duration of Target

From August 2015 to April 2016, 100% of third grade reading students will improve their knowledge of vocabulary and comprehension skills as measured by the Mountain County Schools Third Grade Reading SLO Assessments. Students will increase from their pre-assessment scores to these post-assessment scores as follows:

The minimum expectation for individual student growth is based on the formula which requires students to grow by increasing his/her score by 35% of his/her potential growth.

$$\text{Pre-Assessment Score} + [(100 - \text{Pre-Assessment Score}) * \text{Expected Growth}] = \text{Target}$$

Example using 40 on a pre-assessment:

$$40 + [(100 - 40) * .35]$$

$$40 + [(60) * .35]$$

$$40 + [21]$$

61 is the expected target for the post-assessment

Growth Target for Expected Growth

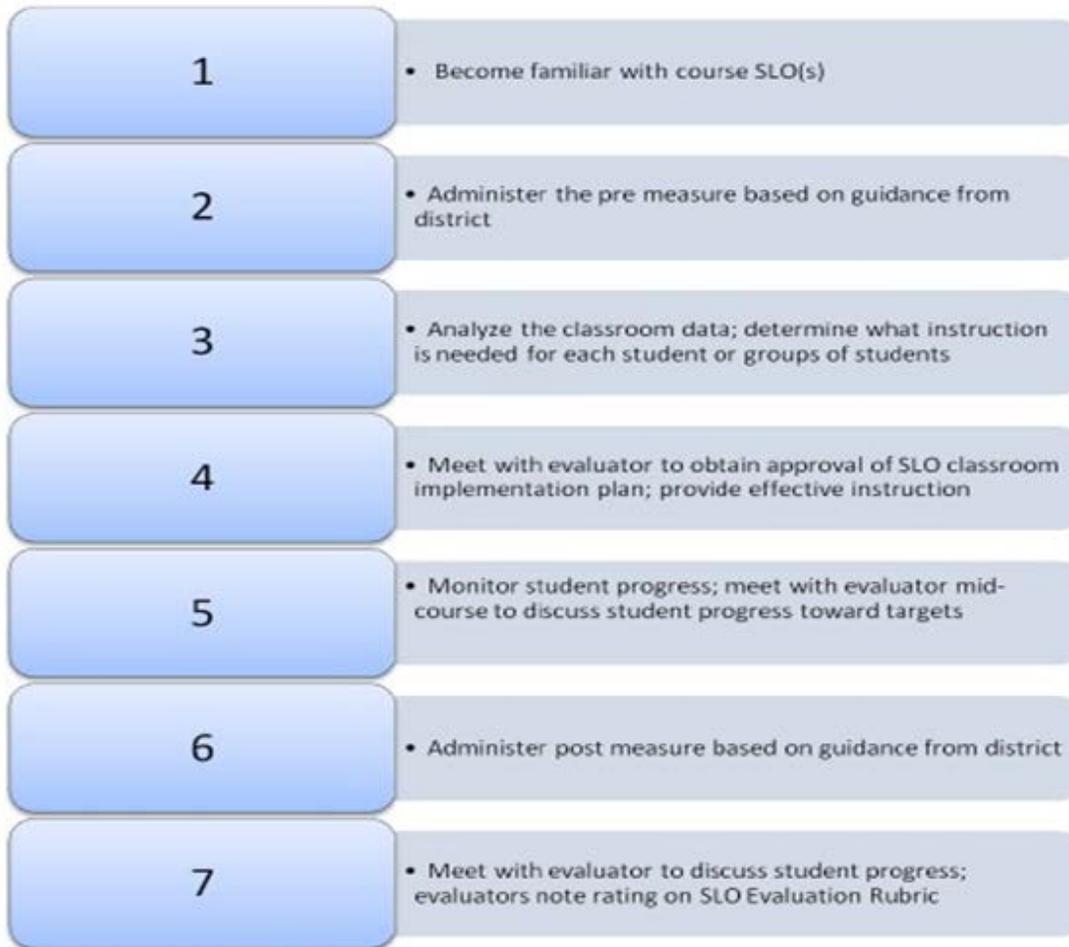
Growth Target for High Growth

Students increasing their score by at least 60% of their expected growth would be demonstrating high growth. A score of 76 or above is the high growth target.

The growth target in the example above is based on a formula of increasing the pre assessment score by 35% of the student's expected growth. Please note the criteria for the high growth target is also stated.

This is only one of several ways growth targets may be set by districts. Additional information and examples of growth target options may be reviewed at <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/School-Improvement/Teacher-and-Leader Effectiveness/Pages/default.aspx>

What do teachers do with SLOs?



Effective planning for SLO implementation

Effective planning for SLO implementation is critical for a meaningful and productive school year.

- ✓ Communicate a positive vision for SLOs throughout the school and how SLOs build on and support current school improvement initiatives.
- ✓ Ensure that teachers have the appropriate professional development and understanding of SLOs in general and with the courses they teach in particular. A proactive, solid understanding of SLOs and the SLO process by teachers will prevent frustration and misunderstandings throughout the school year. See *A Guide for Teachers* document.
- ✓ Determine an SLO leader or team of leaders to lead, communicate, guide, and monitor the SLO process as an integral part of the TKES.

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- ✓ Plan and communicate time windows for preparation of assessments, for administration of SLO assessments. Remember SLOs should be discussed during pre-evaluation, mid-year, and summative conferences.
- ✓ Ensure that SLO assessments are handled in a secure manner. Check with your district for guidance with this process.
- ✓ Monitor to ensure that assessments are administered during the designated district administration windows.
- ✓ Identify how assessments will be scored. Consider team scoring or sample inter-rater reliability as necessary.
- ✓ Clearly communicate how data should be reported (i.e. raw scores, percentages, etc).
- ✓ Provide guidance to teachers about grading practices, communication with students and parents about the SLO process, and other areas that may be impacted by the SLO process.
- ✓ Determine if teachers need professional development in using rubrics, using student data, effective strategies, classroom management, etc.
- ✓ Share concerns and suggestions regarding SLOs and SLO assessments with appropriate district staff.
- ✓ For locally or regionally developed assessments, a review of the Table of Specifications (ToS) will be helpful. The Table of Specification will provide the number of items used to measure each standard, the type of items (multiple choice, supply response, or performance task) that measure each standard, and the depth of knowledge (DOK) of each standard and each item.

Preparing Teachers for SLOs

Local school leaders are encouraged to think about the following questions:

- In what ways can I ensure this is meaningful for teachers and for students in my school?
- How can our leadership team help guide teachers in using their pre-assessment results and utilize SLOs to help improve student growth?

Consider the following questions. How will you...

- Introduce teachers to the SLO process?
- Incorporate this work into your school calendar?
- Guide teachers in using pre assessments results to inform instruction?
- Encourage collaboration among teachers as they work to attain SLO targets?
- Monitor progress and maintain momentum throughout the year?
- Ensure completion and collection of data?

Teachers of non-tested subjects welcome the opportunity to provide viable data that support the contribution their subjects make to student achievement and support their effectiveness as a teacher.

TAPS/SLO conferences with teachers

Teachers will meet with their evaluators at least three times each school year. The Pre-Evaluation Conference and the Mid-Year Conference can be held individually or in small groups such as grade level or content groups. The Summative Evaluation Conference needs to be held individually.

- The first conference, the Pre-Evaluation Conference (August/September) is an opportunity to review the teacher's TAPS self-assessment and the pre assessment baseline data. Local school evaluators can also use this opportunity to discuss which TAPS standards coincide with an effective SLO process.
- The mid-year (typically December/January) conference focuses on the SLO data and performance standards feedback.
- A Summative Evaluation Conference (May) will be held to provide feedback to the teacher regarding the Summative Assessment Report which includes SLO data, TAPS, and student perception survey results.

Teacher conference points

Consider the following guidance for SLO conferences with teachers:

- ✓ Allow teachers to provide a description of their class(es) particularly around any unique or defining characteristics. An example for an art teacher is provided below:

I have five classes of art for third-grade students. There are 129 students total.
Of the third graders I teach, three students are currently taking private art lessons.
67% of the students have been at our school since Kindergarten.
Sixteen students are English Language Learners.
All third grade students receive 45 minutes of art each week.

- ✓ Use the district SLO Statement as a guidance document for discussion because it includes the specified standards, the pre and post assessment windows, district baseline data, etc.
- ✓ For locally or regionally developed assessments, a review of the Table of Specifications (ToS) will be helpful. The Table of Specification will provide the number of items used to measure each standard, the type of items (multiple choice, supply response, or performance task) that measure each standard, and the depth of knowledge (DOK) of each standard and each item.

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- ✓ Have teachers share their analysis of their class(es) SLO pre assessment data. Simple statistical descriptions may be helpful such as the range of scores, the count or frequency of each score, how the scores were distributed across the range, the mean or median, and any outliers or unexpected results. As a result of this analysis, ask teachers:
 - What conclusions have you determined from the pre assessment data?
 - How will you use these results to close the gap between where students are now and where they need to be?

An American Government example is provided below:

I have two sections of American Government. A total of 51 students took the pre measure. The lowest score was a 5 and the highest score was a 54. Both classes had similar pre measure distributions.

19 students or 40% scored between 0-20.

25 students or 53% scored between 21-40.

7 students or 7% scored between 41-60.

The mean was 27.

- ✓ Determine if the teacher knows each student's expected and high growth target as indicated in the district SLO statement.
- ✓ Ensure that teachers know where and how to record student SLO results.
- ✓ Outline how teachers can use the SLO process as evidence of the ten Teacher Assessment of Performance Standards (TAPS) components of Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES).
- ✓ Identify what strategies teachers will consistently utilize so that students attain their growth targets.
- ✓ Review how teachers will regularly monitor student progress.
- ✓ Indicate the evidence you need teachers to organize for the Mid-Year Conference.

Are SLO measures valid and reliable?

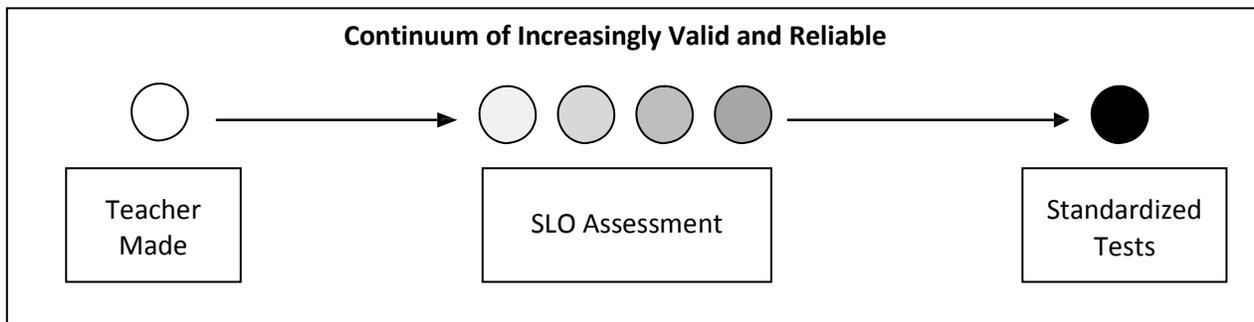
At the core of each SLO are the pre and post assessments used to determine student learning toward the student learning objective. “The attribute of validity is arguably the most important quality of an assessment” (Gareis & Grant, 2008, p. 35). Validity is concerned with the appropriateness/ability of the assessment to measure what it is meant to assess. In the SLO process, a quality assessment connects teacher, student, and course expectations and standards.

Districts may procure, adapt, or develop assessments. SLO assessments should be selected and/or developed based on their appropriateness for the grade and content standards chosen for the SLO.

SLO assessments may include written assessments, performance assessments, and/or work products. As districts evaluate SLO assessments, it is important to be mindful of psychometric constructs but as noted by Garieis and Grant, “validity is not an either /or proposition, instead it is a matter of degree” (2008, p. 35). Therefore, improving the reliability and validity of SLO assessments will be an ongoing process for districts.

“The SLO assessment requires a different level of teaching that pushes teachers out of their comfort zones towards a more rigorous higher standard of critical thinking are for the Kindergarten students.”

James Davis, Kindergarten



Locally/regionally developed SLO measures

Many districts have and will develop their own SLO assessments. Districts may procure, adapt, or create measures. Typically educators feel most comfortable with assessments they develop and that are based on recent classroom work. However, the current literature on developing assessments is far from the process typically undertaken by classroom teachers.

The GaDOE offers professional development in the area of SLO assessments. The GaDOE has developed a three step SLO assessment development process which supports districts in the development of balanced and rigorous assessments.

Districts selected content experts to serve on teams which developed local /regional measures using this rigorous development process. Teams consisted of recommended teachers, personnel with assessment design expertise and district content leaders.

Teams selected overarching standards for their assigned course. Standards were then analyzed to determine what content and skills students needed in order to master the standard. Based on the content and skills students need to demonstrate, appropriate types, such as performance tasks, supply response, or multiple choice, and number of items were determined. A Table of Specifications was created for each measure which detailed the content and level of cognitive demand for the items as well as the standards, and specified the types, number, and emphases of each item” (Gareis & Grant, 2008).

“This was the best professional learning that I have ever had....I now understand how to write appropriate test questions...I also understand that assessment drives instruction.”

Teacher, Henry County

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To learn more...

The Georgia Department of Education's webpage for Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (<http://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Teacher-and-Leader-Effectiveness/Pages/Student-Learning-Objectives.aspx>) has additional documents and guidance.

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