

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

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As Measures of Educator Effectiveness

A Guide for District Leadership

District-developed SLOs

SLOs are required, recommended, or identified as an example of student growth in nearly half of U.S. states.

Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are measurable, academic goals 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 components of the Leader Keys Effectiveness System (LKES), a triangulation approach to leader effectiveness. In addition, SLOs

are required, recommended, or identified as an example of student growth in nearly half of the U.S. states (Lachlan-Hache, Cushing, Bivona, 2012, p.1).

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 that they have greater access to student achievement data and they use the data more effectively, particularly baseline data, to establish growth expectations, to focus earlier on students who need more assistance and to monitor progress. (Community Training and Assistance Center, 2004).

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 SLO implementation. In addition, the performance of pilot schools exceeded that of the match schools on these same tests. Qualitative data analyses 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).

SLOs provide powerful opportunities for districts to increase student growth.

Setting goals for students, using data to assess student progress, and adjusting instruction based on that progress demonstrate good teaching practices (What Works Clearinghouse, 2009). Because SLOs connect course standards with effective classroom instruction and provide data on student academic growth, they are powerful tools for increasing student achievement in district schools.

SLOs support district goals and plans

SLOs afford the opportunity to support the district's vision, mission, and goals. Because SLOs will eventually touch every non-tested classroom and due to the inherent teacher interest in feedback from their local school evaluators; districts can use the SLO process to enhance and strengthen current initiatives and district plans. Consider the following questions when the district leadership team discusses district goals and initiatives and reflects on how SLOs can support and strengthen those goals.

- ✓ How can SLOs support or supplement any current district benchmark and formative assessments?
- ✓ In what ways can current district assessments be used or adapted as SLO assessments?
- ✓ What district and/or school professional development can be actualized, reinforced, or monitored with the SLO process?
- ✓ In what ways can SLO measures improve the quality of all assessments?
- ✓ How might the SLO process ensure that teachers are using high impact strategies to instruct at the same level of cognitive demand as the course standards?
- ✓ How can the SLO process ensure that teachers increase their understanding of course standards and enhance their professional knowledge, instructional planning, and the performance standards component of Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)?
- ✓ How does the Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS) and SLO components reinforce standards based classrooms?
- ✓ How can SLOs support collaboration at all levels of the organization?

SLOs link accountability and support. They work in tandem with classroom observations to more accurately understand learning and teachers' contributions to that learning.

SLOs 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.
(CTAC, 2012)

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 improving student growth in non-tested courses in Georgia schools. Throughout the tenure of “No Child Left Behind” legislation, local school leaders have closely analyzed the data from tested courses and often have orchestrated teaching talent, resources, and schedules to the benefit of their students in these tested subjects. Now via the SLO process, 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.

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

- Helps teachers link teacher practice to student learning
- Reinforces good teaching practices
- Helps teachers to improve their daily strategies
- Provides evidence for multiple, if not all, TAPS standards
For example using baseline data to form and instruct small groups of students supports Standard 3: Instructional Planning, Standard 4: Differentiated instruction, and Standard 6: Assessment Uses.
- Enables rich collaboration/planning for grade level and department teams
- Provides a venue for teachers to implement current professional learning so that they are consistently utilizing high impact teaching strategies
- Provides a venue for leaders to monitor the implementation of current professional learning to ensure transfer of professional learning to the classroom
- 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 way to improve teacher effectiveness via teacher reflection and professional development

Enhancing district support processes

If districts are to realize the powerful potential to improve student growth using the SLO process in schools and classrooms, districts will need to enhance or build support structures that provide a foundation for the work at the teacher level, local school evaluator level, and at the district level. It is important to remember that there will need to be support processes at all levels of the organization.

Support processes to consider:

Align SLO work with district goals.

As districts align the SLO work with district goals and initiatives, leaders may create a positive vision or plan for how SLOs will dovetail with district initiatives. A proactive and positive vision for implementing SLOs in your district is a first step in effectively meeting this leadership challenge.

To the extent that SLOs, 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).

Ensure support from superintendent and leaders

The scope of SLO work is pervasive and as a result can have a powerful impact on all levels of the organization. Therefore, support from the highest levels of the organization is critical. In times of transition or turnover this type of communication is very important. Consider proactive and regular SLO updates for the superintendent and local Board of Education.

Establish SLO leaders and teams

Districts need organized and effective leader(s) who will own and commit to the SLO work. The leaders' skill set and commitment to the work can make or break successful SLO implementation. The scope of work, because it will encompass non-tested subjects and involves data systems, assessment, professional development, curriculum and instruction, and human resources, may warrant a team of leaders who work under the guidance of a designated point person. It will be helpful to define roles and responsibilities for each person. Designated leader/teacher teams at the school levels that coincide with professional learning communities (PLCs) and/or data teams may be worth considering.

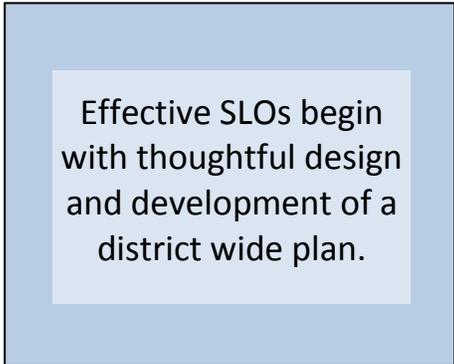
Effectively plan for annual SLO work

Effective annual planning with calendar dates and windows will help ensure a meaningful and productive SLO development, implementation, and revision cycle. These plans should be communicated with all levels of the organization. An advanced planner or year-at-a-glance could be very helpful.

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SLOs steps which typically involve teachers include:

- Development of additional SLOs
- Creating or procuring SLO assessments
- Organizing SLO pre- assessment data
- Using data to set growth targets
- Analyzing data from SLOs
- Approving SLOs prior to submission
- Revision of SLO assessments



Effective SLOs begin with thoughtful design and development of a district wide plan.

Much of this work is on-going all year and should be an integral part of the district's work in supporting schools.

Communicate with all stakeholders regularly

Confusion and missteps at the teacher, school, and district level can be minimized with well-defined communications. District and school calendars, regularly scheduled meetings, minutes of meetings, website information, and email reminders can be helpful in communicating SLO steps, pre and post administration windows, collaboration sessions, etc. District rules and procedures about pre and post assessments, security of assessments, etc. should be clearly communicated in multiple formats.

Because SLO work is new and innovative, it might be very helpful for districts to have established feedback loops where suggestions or concerns from all stakeholders are communicated and addressed. It will also be helpful for teachers and principals to know to whom they can address questions regarding the SLO process.

Provide resources.

All components of implementing the SLO process need to be considered such as:

- The format of assessments (paper copies, computer administration, etc.).
- Distribution and collection of assessments.
- Reporting of data from SLO assessments.
- Financial resources and storage resources may be needed.

Sensibly secure SLO measures

Assessments should be sensibly secured. Teachers should not have unnecessary copies or exposure to the measures that would reduce the measures' ability to accurately measure student learning of the course standards. On the other hand, districts should ensure that teachers have pertinent information about the SLO in order to be effective. Sharing the SLO Statement Form and the Table of Specifications with teachers is highly recommended.

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District security procedures should be based on sound professional judgment and practice but should not prevent the teachers from knowing how to use the pre assessment data in planning classroom instruction. Procedures for SLO assessments should be consistent with other common district measures.

Once district procedures are determined they should be in writing and should be administered with consistency and fidelity. Violations and irregularities should be documented with the stated problem and resolution based on district procedures.

Develop/revise increasing valid and reliable SLO measures

High quality SLO assessments indicate true alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Many districts have and will continue develop their own SLO assessments. It is not unusual for educators to find issue with others' assessments. Typically educators feel most comfortable with assessments they develop and that are based on recent classroom work. "In addition, research in the field suggests that assessment as a competency is an area of relative discomfort, if not weakness, among teachers" (Gareis & Grant, 2008, p. 19).

GaDOE has established a rigorous SLO assessment development process. It is advisable for districts to build local capacity and provide ongoing professional learning in the development of balanced and rigorous SLO assessments.

Prepare teachers and local school leaders for effective SLO implementation

A positive vision for SLOs and how they support current school improvement initiatives is paramount. A proactive, solid understanding of SLOs by teachers and leaders will prevent frustration and misunderstandings throughout the school year. Ensure that teachers and leaders have the appropriate professional development and understanding of SLOs in general and with the courses they teach in particular.

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Professional development predicated on student growth is critical

New initiatives, such as SLO work, often assume that teachers will embrace or understand the concept of reform and change their practices. Both educational research and the states and districts who have worked with SLOs over several years indicate that there is a profound connection between SLOs, a teacher’s subject matter knowledge, specific teaching practices, and student achievement.

Professional development needs to be based on continuous reviews of student growth by school staff. This review will reveal areas in which school staff may need assistance and learning.

Provide training and consider a local district process for inter-rater reliability opportunities

Inter-rater reliability practices should be used with pre and post SLO assessment items, as well as with TAPS ratings and scoring. Inter-rater reliability practices build consistency, reliability, and confidence in what otherwise would be a very subjective process. Inter-rater reliability practices build educators’ competence in aligning work and evaluation to the standards and/or rubrics and prevent what would otherwise be “drift” away from the standards/rubrics.

Many 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.

Supporting leaders in the SLO process

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

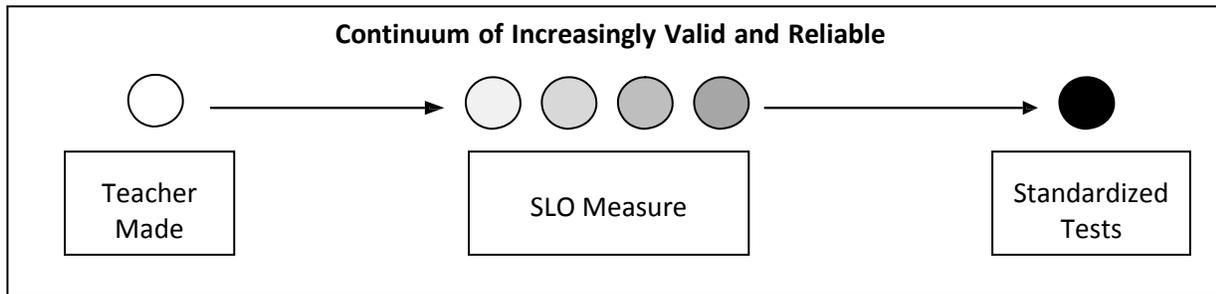
Local school leaders are encouraged to think about the following questions:

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

Preparing teachers for the SLO process

In working with local school leaders, it is important to determine how teachers will learn and implement the SLO process. Consider the following questions that school leaders should use to guide teacher preparation.

How will you...



- Introduce teachers to the SLO process?
- Incorporate this work into your school wide calendar?
- Help teachers plan for SLO implementation?
- Encourage collaboration among teachers as they work to attain SLO goals?
- Guide teachers in using pre-assessment results to inform instruction?
- Monitor progress throughout the year?
- Ensure fidelity of assessment administration and collect data?
- Use the end of the year results for reflection and continuous improvement for the next term?

Ensuring balanced and rigorous SLO measures

At the core of each SLO is the assessment used to determine student growth toward the student learning objective. “The attribute of validity is arguably the most important quality of an assessment” (p. 35). Validity is concerned with the appropriateness/ability of the assessment to measure what it is meant to assess.

SLO assessments are designed/selected to provide confidence and reassurance to teachers and administrators that the assessments will directly inform instruction and offer true indications of attainment of the SLO targets. SLO assessments are not standardized measures but are designed to give timely feedback about students’ content and skill attainment.

“To review, validity is concerned with the confidence with which we may draw inferences about student learning from an assessment. Furthermore, validity is not an either /or proposition, instead it is a matter of degree” (Gareis & Grant, 2008, p.35). Therefore, improving the reliability and validity will be an ongoing district process.

Locally/regionally developed SLO measures

Districts may procure, adapt, or develop assessments. SLO assessments should be selected and/or developed based on the course and content standards chosen for the SLO. SLO assessments may include written assessments, performance assessments, and/or work products.

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

“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

SLO assessment teams select the standards for their assigned course. Standards are analyzed to determine what content and skills students need to master the standard. Based on the content and skills students need to demonstrate, appropriate types and number of items, such as performance tasks, supply response, or multiple choice are determined. A Table of Specifications is created for each measure which details 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).

Improving SLO assessments will be an ongoing process. The composition of these assessments, the length of these measures, and their results should be regularly examined by groups of trained educators using a common set of criteria which has been provided by the GaDOE.

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. A proactive, solid understanding of SLOs and the SLO process by teachers will prevent frustration and misunderstandings throughout the school year. See *SLOs 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.
- ✓ Plan and communicate time windows for preparation of assessments, for administration of SLO assessments, for Pre-Evaluation Conferences, Mid-Course Conferences, and Summative

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Evaluation Conferences.

- ✓ Ensure that SLO assessments are handled in a secure manner. Check with your district for guidance with this process.
- ✓ Monitor that assessments are being 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 what 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. This document 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.

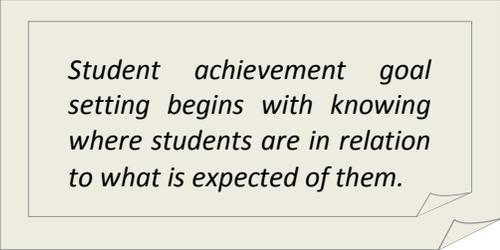
TAPS/SLO conferences with teachers

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, called the Pre-Evaluation Conference (August/September) is an opportunity to review the teacher's TAPS self-assessment and also review the teacher's baseline data from the SLO pre measure. 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 written and oral feedback to the teacher regarding the Summative Assessment Report which includes SLO data, TAPS, and student perception survey results. Local school evaluators will use the SLO Evaluation Rubric to rate the teacher's SLO component of TKES.



Student achievement goal setting begins with knowing where students are in relation to what is expected of them.

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.

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- ✓ Have teachers share their analysis of their class(es) SLO pre measure 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 measure 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 assessment. 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.

- ✓ Use the district SLO Statement form as a guidance document for discussion since it includes the specified standards, the pre and post measure windows, district baseline data, etc.
- ✓ Determine if the teacher knows each student's expected and high growth targets as identified in the district SLO statement.
- ✓ Ensure that teachers know where and how to record student assessment data
- ✓ Consider discussing 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).
- ✓ Outline what strategies teachers will consistently utilize so that students attain their growth targets.
- ✓ Identify how teachers will regularly monitor student progress.
- ✓ Determine what evidence you need teachers to provide or prepare for the Mid-Year Conference.

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To learn more...

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

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