

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Student Learning Objectives and SD's Model Teacher & Principal Evaluation Systems**

Updated: Nov. 14, 2013

South Dakota's model teacher and principal effectiveness systems rely on student learning objectives, or SLOs, to measure student growth. Below are answers to frequently asked questions regarding SLOs.

#### **What is a student learning objective?**

A student learning objective is a teacher-driven goal or set of goals that establishes expectations for student academic growth over a period of time. These specific, measurable student learning goals are based on student learning needs and aligned to applicable standards. SLOs reflect a rigorous, yet realistic expectation of student growth that can be achieved during a given instructional period. SLOs must be approved by the principal.

#### **What are the steps in developing an SLO?**

Many South Dakota educators are already familiar with the process of setting academic growth goals for students. Implementing SLOs as a measure of teacher effectiveness takes the next step and integrates the SLO process into the district's broader evaluation and professional growth process. Establishing SLOs ensures that a teacher's student growth rating is based on a richer, more authentic measure than one single test score.

Developing an SLO starts with four questions:

- 1) What do I most want my students to know and be able to do?
- 2) Where are my students starting?
- 3) What assessments are available?
- 4) What can I expect my students to achieve?

#### **What is a SMART goal?**

The SMART goal checklist is a valuable tool for evaluating the quality of an SLO. A SMART goal meets the following criteria:

**S - Specific.** To be specific, the goal should state exactly what content is to be addressed. The content should be tied directly to the standards for a grade and subject.

**M - Measurable.** Measures of student achievement should be stated as increases in rate, percentage, number, level of benchmark, level of performance, rubric standards, or a juried level of a standard.

**A - Appropriate.** To be appropriate, the goal should be directly related to the subject, to the standard(s), and to the students. The goal must be within the teacher's realm of influence in the classroom.

**R - Realistic and rigorous.** Realistic goals are rigorous and should stretch the outer bounds of what is attainable. Realistic goals are not easy goals.

T - Time-bound. The goal needs to be set within a timeframe such as the length of a class, course, or school year. Ongoing progress monitoring provides valuable information for adjusting teacher instruction. Data is collected between two points in time, as close as possible to the beginning and end of a course.

### **What are some examples of student learning objectives?**

Below is an example of an SLO written by a group of 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teachers in one of South Dakota's teacher effectiveness pilot schools. More examples will be available to share at the end of the pilot. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction also has a repository of SLO examples from a wide array of content areas. You can visit that site at <http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=950936> to get ideas.

- **Student Learning Objective:**

For the 2013-14 school year, my second grade students will demonstrate measurable growth in mathematics computation on the DIBELS Math Assessment. At least 85% of my students will meet or exceed the DIBELS computation benchmark by the end of the year.

This goal addresses Common Core Standard 2.OA.2: Fluently add and subtract within 20 using mental strategies. By the end of Grade 2, know from memory all sums of two one-digit numbers.

### **How do SLOs figure into a teacher's student growth rating?**

A teacher's student growth rating is based on his or her percentage of SLO goal attainment. A Low Growth rating indicates that a teacher's SLO(s) was less than 65 percent attained. An Expected Growth rating indicates that a teacher's SLO(s) was 65 to 85 percent attained, and a High Growth rating indicates that a teacher's SLO(s) was 86 to 100 percent attained.

### **How do SLOs figure into a principal's student growth rating?**

A principal's student growth rating is primarily determined by the percentage of teachers under his or her supervision who have success meeting student learning objectives. A Low Growth rating for a principal indicates that less than 80% of teachers attain Expected Growth. An Expected Growth rating indicates that 80% to 90% of teachers attain Expected Growth, and a High Growth rating indicates that 91% to 100% of teachers attain Expected Growth. This measure accounts for 75 percent of a principal's student growth rating.

The secondary measure of a principal's impact on student growth requires a principal, in cooperation with the district superintendent, to set school-level growth goals based on available state accountability data (SPI or AMOs). In years when such data is available, this measure accounts for 25 percent of a principal's student growth rating.

### **How many SLOs must be a part of the student growth rating?**

Under the model system, teachers are required to develop a single SLO based on the critical learning needs of students in a particular class or course. For example:

- A second-grade teacher responsible for teaching multiple content areas only needs to create one SLO for one of those content areas.
- A physical education teacher who teaches multiple classes and even multiple grade levels is only required to create one SLO for one class in one grade level.
- A high school math and science teacher need only create one SLO for one class in one content area. There is nothing stopping a teacher from developing more than one SLO, but under the model system, only one needs to be a part of the evaluation.

### **Who approves SLOs?**

While the development of SLOs is meant to be a teacher-driven process, principals (or the principal's designee who is responsible for evaluation) must approve final SLOs.

### **Can SLOs be shared amongst teachers?**

Yes, some schools choose to write SLOs collaboratively. For example, all the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers in an elementary school may choose to focus on the same goal related to a particular standard.

### **Must teachers use state assessment data as part of the SLO process?**

Yes. For those teachers whose students take the state assessment in English-language arts, math and/or science, they must incorporate the data from these assessments into the SLO process. Because of the timing of when results from these assessments become available, it would not be possible to use them to determine growth within a year's time. Therefore, the expectation is that the state assessment data will be used to inform SLO goal setting, but that other tools will be used to measure progress in meeting those goals.

### **What kinds of assessments are appropriate to use when developing SLOs?**

Below is a list of assessments that would be appropriate to use when developing SLOs:

- **STATE MANDATED ASSESSMENTS**

This category includes assessments mandated for use statewide and includes assessments required by state and federal law.

Examples: Smarter Balanced Assessment, Dakota Step Science Assessment

- **COMMON STATE AND DISTRICT ASSESSMENTS**

This category includes assessments not mandated for state use but widely used by districts and schools. Assessments in this category include commercially available assessments, district-developed pre- and post-tests and course-level assessments. Assessments could also take the form of established rubric-scored performance-based assessments. See question below.

Examples: Assessments available through the South Dakota Assessment Portal, End-of-Course Exams, Write-to-Learn, WIDA-Access Placement Test (English-language learners), National Career Readiness Certificate, DIBELS, AP Exams, STARS reading/math, MAPS, AIMS Web, CTE Performance Contests/Judging.

- **TEACHER-DEVELOPED ASSESSMENTS**

This category of assessments includes classroom assessments used in a single course by a particular teacher

**What about measuring growth for subject areas that may not have a “traditional” assessment available?**

For some subject areas, it may be appropriate that the assessment of whether or not student growth has occurred takes the form of a performance-based rubric. Welding, art and band instructors are just a few examples of the individuals who will find rubrics to be especially effective assessments.

**What is the principal’s role in the development of SLOs?**

Principals support the SLO process by guiding development of, and approving SLOs, providing structured and ongoing feedback, and scoring final results.

Teachers, either individually or in teams, are encouraged to assume much of the responsibility for developing rigorous, achievable SLOs. But, as the instructional leader, the principal holds the ultimate responsibility for leading teachers through the process of establishing high-quality SLOs. The time and support necessary to implement SLOs will vary widely based on a district’s unique circumstances.

To address time and capacity issues, schools are encouraged to consider the following:

- Integrating SLO development into existing professional support systems, including mentoring and induction programs, common planning time and professional learning communities.
- Encouraging teachers working in similar grades and subjects to work collaboratively on SLO development.
- Allocate available in-service time to reinforcing key SLO concepts and building skills necessary to complete SLO development.

**What happens after an SLO is approved?**

Once an SLO has been approved, principals and teachers should regularly communicate regarding progress toward goal attainment. Pre- or post-observation conferences can be a convenient time to have those discussions. Evaluators may want to consider conducting formal and/or informal observations in conjunction with lessons related to an SLO.