



# Reform Support Network

## A Quality Control Toolkit for Student Learning Objectives

December 2012

This toolkit features links to tools developed by leading practitioners and the Reform Support Network in two formats: incorporated into the content and organized into a convenient tool box at the end of the publication.

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## Introduction

### Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Quality Control

The Race to the Top Reform Support Network (RSN) designed this toolkit to help States and school districts implement **SLOs** with the highest degree of quality. States and districts achieve quality implementation when their SLOs set high yet attainable expectations for students and teachers, and when student success on SLOs predicts student success on other independent measures. The toolkit contains templates, guidance documents, sample SLOs and other tools, which States and school districts can select or adapt for their own purposes as they implement a system of quality control.

For many States and school districts, SLOs are becoming the solution of choice to the challenge of integrating teachers of non-tested grades and subjects into evaluation and compensation systems that require measures of student growth. As part of their evaluation systems, some States are requiring teachers of tested grades and subjects to develop student learning objectives as well. Although specifics of the SLO approach vary across jurisdictions, the implementation process is similar in most, though not all, States and school districts. At the start of the school year, teachers, principals or district administrators set one or more learning goals for students and identify a measure or measures for assessing progress towards them. In most cases, the principal, an evaluator or the district approves the learning goal(s) and the assessment(s). In many schools, teachers later sit down with evaluators for a mid-term conference to discuss progress students are making toward the learning goals. At the end of the year, teachers and their evaluators assess student progress, and evaluators determine how well the teacher succeeded in achieving it.

Though this toolkit focuses reader attention on using SLOs to integrate teachers of non-tested grades and subjects, SLOs fuel reflective classroom practices and good instruction for all teachers. Effective teachers have always gathered data, set goals based on that

data and then assessed whether the goals have been met. When well implemented by schools or districts, the SLO process brings consistency and rigor to this sound practice. It has the added value of providing school districts with an authentic way to assess the impact educators have on student learning. However, implementing SLOs effectively requires more attention to instructional practice than administering a State-standardized assessment to help determine the effectiveness of teachers.

SLOs present States and school districts with the challenge of ensuring their quality, rigor and comparability across classrooms, districts and entire States. Yet States and school districts cannot expect their SLOs to yield the same sort of scientific validity and reliability that standardized State assessments produce. That is simply not possible. However, there is strong precedent in other fields for using objective-based outcomes. Employers and employees in many American industries sit down together annually to set objectives and the metrics they will use to determine whether they have been met. Employers make decisions about their employees—whether to sign them up for training or to advance them, for instance—based on the results of the objectives. And they do so without using psychometric methods to prove that the metrics are relevant, or that expectations have been met. Still, employees should expect a fair, rigorous and high-quality process of setting objectives and implementing them.

The Reform Support Network has designed this quality control toolkit to help States and school districts meet this challenge.

### History of SLOs

While great teachers have always set and monitored learning objectives for students, the idea that these objectives should be tied to high-stakes decisions emerged in Denver in 1999, when the Denver Classroom Teachers Association and Denver Public Schools agreed to pilot a performance-pay system that required teachers of both tested and non-tested grades and subjects to set “student growth objectives.” The evaluation of this pilot revealed

two particularly compelling results: Teachers who developed high-quality SLOs produced better student-achievement gains, and student achievement increased as the length of teacher participation in the pilot increased.<sup>1</sup> To this day, Denver teachers who meet their objectives receive pay increases.

Soon after Denver established student growth objectives as a measure of teacher effectiveness, the Austin Independent School District also began using student learning objectives to make compensation decisions. No State or district in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, used student learning objectives as a formal component of educator evaluation systems.

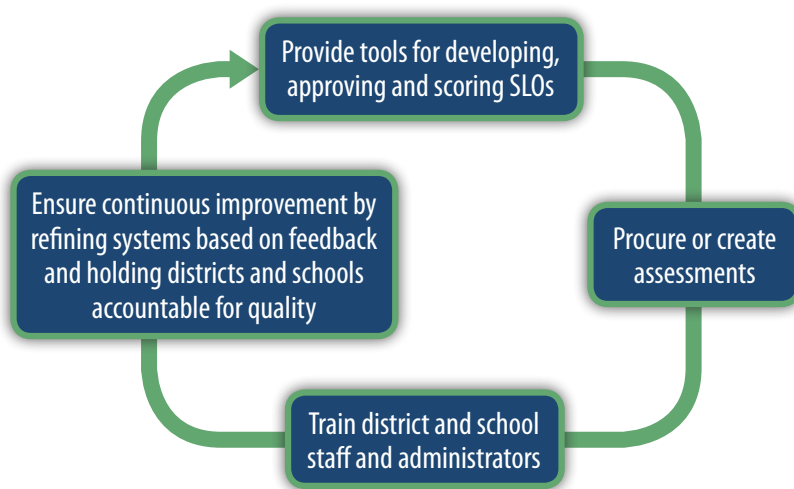
That changed with the arrival of the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top grant program, with first and second-round winners required to implement teacher evaluation systems that differentiate effectiveness, by using multiple rating categories that take into account student growth as a significant factor. While many winning States could point to their growth measures for teachers of tested grades and subjects, they had little or nothing to measure the performance of teachers of non-tested grades and subjects (for example, kindergarten, first-grade and second-grade teachers; special education, music and art teachers; and physical education, career, technical, social studies and science teachers). Some States decided to use school-wide growth results as measures of performance for teachers of non-tested grades and subjects while others developed end-of-course assessments for nearly every grade and discipline. Still many others decided to implement student learning objectives. Among Race to the Top States, these include Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Catalyst for Change: Pay For Performance in Denver Final Report*, CTAC (2004), <http://www.ctacusa.com/PDFs/Rpt-CatalystChangeExecSumm-2004.pdf>

## Overview of Toolkit Contents

As part of their participation in the Race to the Top grant program, leaders from 10 State departments of education joined a Student Learning Objective Work Group. Participants identified several objectives for the work group, including the creation of an SLO quality control framework and a toolkit to inform it. Leaders from Georgia, Maryland, New York and Ohio volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to oversee the development of these products. The first stage of their work resulted in the following four-stage framework:

### SLO Quality Control Framework



The second stage of the group's work focused on identifying existing potential material for each component of the framework. The group also asked the RSN to create a small number of tools that the field has yet to develop. These, they said, included those that would help them monitor the approval of SLOs, audit SLO scoring and provide an SLO certification process for evaluators. The RSN took the group's direction and examined the tools they suggested and many others. It created the requested tools where it could. The tools the RSN finally selected and developed now reside in this toolkit.

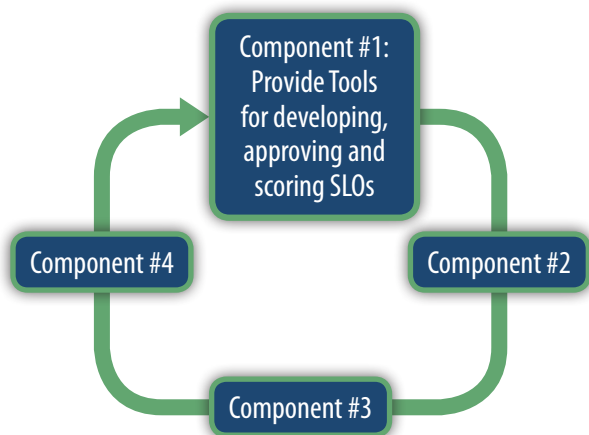
Although a work group of States has reviewed and strengthened the new tools, the RSN suggests that States and school districts view them as initial efforts upon which they can build and improve. In most cases, these tools provide potential users with

guidance: questions to answer before choosing an approach, cautions to take into consideration and options for action. The approach the RSN took to the development of these tools distinguishes them from many of the materials in the toolkit—which are ready for use in the field immediately—and underlines the need for jurisdictions to create even better tools based on this guidance.

We have divided the toolkit into the four components of the framework. Some of the components have more tools than others. Given the current state of the art in certain areas of SLO implementation, other components are less robust.

The RSN is grateful to the innovators who produced the materials that now populate the toolkit. They provide a foundation upon which States can build a system of quality control so that teachers of non-tested grades and subjects can participate with greater rigor and quality in new pay and evaluation systems that require measures of student growth. While the tools herein represent the current state of the art, we should expect SEAs and LEAs to improve them over time. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the RSN will continue to update the toolkit as the field gains greater insight and develops even stronger approaches.

## Component #1: Provide Guidance, Templates and Tools to Develop, Approve and Score SLOs



The SLO process typically begins with the examination of student achievement data followed by the development of the SLO itself, its approval, monitoring and finally its scoring for inclusion as a factor in a teacher’s summative evaluation rating and/or as a data point for a decision about her future compensation. Each step in the process requires thoughtful communication and collaboration between teachers and their evaluators, a solid understanding of the expectations for SLO quality and solid tools to support implementation.

This section of the SLO Quality Control Toolkit provides sample approaches to creating, approving, and scoring student learning objectives as well as overall guidance to those who would implement them.

### Creating the SLO: Development Templates

Teachers and administrators use SLO development templates to create and record SLOs for a defined interval of instruction. Templates typically outline the components of SLOs that teachers and administrators must address in their production. State and district templates vary in the number and types of components they require, though they are almost always aligned to the specifics of their SLO framework. These components most commonly include the targeted student population, baseline information on student learning, learning targets, district or State standards aligned to those goals and a rationale for selection of the target. Sometimes templates require teachers to enumerate the instructional strategies they will use to meet their objectives.

Early adopters such as **Denver Public Schools** pioneered the basic template that many States have modeled their own templates after, used as a starting point for modification or, in some cases, altered significantly. In one recent and important innovation, some jurisdictions such as **New York, Louisiana** and **Indiana** have started to incorporate the final scoring mechanics of SLOs into the template itself so teachers and evaluators know from the start what results they will have to produce to receive a specific rating.

New York requires all teachers and principals to use a State-developed template that includes the same basic elements of early adopters but adds to it the State's effectiveness-scoring scale so teachers know as they begin SLO implementation how evaluators will determine the range of student performance that will define their SLO rating. Louisiana includes a "scoring plan" in its template so that teachers and evaluators establish at the outset how a rating will be assigned at the end of the year. Indiana does the same. What's more, designers built the template around a five-step process that begins with the selection of an assessment—noteworthy as a starting point in and of itself—and concludes with an end-of-course judgment about the teacher's performance. Although most SLO systems begin quality control when evaluators apply rubrics or checklists to gauge the quality of an SLO, Indiana builds a system of quality control into the template itself.

### **Approving the SLO: Approval Rubrics or Checklists**

Once written, an SLO usually goes through an approval process informed by a rubric or checklist, created by the State or district and designed to measure the quality of the SLO and/or determine if it meets approval standards. Most rubrics in the field are in the tradition of those developed by early adopters. They have three to four performance levels (for example, unsatisfactory, needs improvement, acceptable, excellent) that evaluators use to rate the SLO in each of several domains, usually the components of an SLO established by State or district templates/frameworks.

Helpful examples of these rubrics come from **Denver** and **Austin**. In Denver, teachers and principals rate SLOs in several areas: rationale, population, interval of instruction, assessment, expected gain, learning content and strategies. Some consider extensive rubrics like Denver's to be teaching tools for those learning how to write and score SLOs, as they use them to think through how to move SLOs from poor to acceptable to great. The number of decision points required by these rubrics, however, has resulted in debate within the SLO community about

whether they make SLO implementation difficult for administrators to manage, especially in large schools. Furthermore, school districts typically do not consider approval ratings (that is, whether an SLO is at an "excellent" or "acceptable" level) as part of a teacher's final score, so the value of the rating can be unclear.

As more jurisdictions are implementing SLOs, gaining experience and learning from their peers, they have begun experimenting with easier-to-use tools to evaluate the quality of SLOs and ultimately approve them. For instance, Rhode Island initially used a comprehensive rubric with several domains and performance levels. **Rhode Island** now asks teachers and administrators to consider simply whether an SLO is acceptable or unacceptable in three different areas. The development of more simplified tools for SLO approval is in fact an emerging trend, with **Indiana, Ohio,** and **Louisiana** using tools that function not as rubrics but as checklists aligned to standards for high-quality SLOs. The **Reform Support Network** itself, through the leadership of Georgia, Maryland, New York, and Rhode Island, has developed a draft approval tool in the same tradition.

### **Scoring the SLO: Scoring Guidance**

District evaluators use scoring guidance and rubrics to measure how teachers have performed in pursuit of their SLO targets. Scoring criteria are typically locally controlled, with schools or districts defining success—though many simply implement the guidance provided by States.

Almost all districts and States differentiate teacher performance on SLOs by establishing four or five performance levels. Some districts and States define success in terms of whether targets are "partially met," "fully met," or "exceeded." **Rhode Island** uses different terms: "Minimal," "Partial," "Full," or "Exceptional Attainment." Others, such as **New York**, describe success in alignment with its overall evaluation framework's effectiveness performance levels (for example, ineffective, developing, effective, or highly effective).

For the purpose of quality control, however, States and school districts must decide the degree to which evaluator judgment plays a role in determining whether teachers meet or exceed SLO targets and what performance level they achieve as a result. Some approaches to scoring SLO success leave very little room for this judgment, relying strictly on mathematical formulas and computations to ensure consistency of scoring. **Ohio**, for example, recommends that districts use an Excel spreadsheet scoring calculator to input individual student pre-test, post-test, and growth scores. “Once the relevant information has been inputted in the Excel spreadsheet,” Ohio’s scoring guidance document reads, “attainment of the student growth targets and overall SLO rating will be automatically computed and displayed.” Similarly, Indiana requires teachers and evaluators to set mastery goals for whole classes of students and then measure teacher effectiveness against the percentage of students who perform within a specific numeric range. For instance, a scoring example in an Indiana SLO guidebook labels a world history teacher highly effective if at least 90 percent of her students achieve 85/100 or better on the end-of-course world history assessment. For an effective teacher, that percentage is 74 percent. For an ineffective teacher it is below 54 percent. Many States adhere to an approach that utilizes percentages, including **Louisiana** and **Georgia**.

A different approach allows evaluators to examine the performance of teachers against their objectives more holistically. **Rhode Island** allows teachers and evaluators to use multiple measures to determine if objectives have been met, requiring evaluators to examine a body of evidence and make determinations based on a reasoned review of it.

**Indiana** takes aspects of both approaches. As it requires strict reliance on numeric measures for whole-class objectives, it has less strict requirements for SLOs written for targeted populations. In fact, for targeted-population SLOs in Indiana, “evaluators decide which performance level best describes the effect the teacher had on his or her students’ learning,” the Indiana SLO guidebook RISE suggests. “This decision requires professional judgment.”

New York draws on both approaches as well. For some teachers and principals who teach grades or subjects that have a State-provided growth measure, the State will provide the final score for the SLO. For other teachers and principals, New York leaves the decision on how to score SLOs up to superintendents of districts, though it requires teachers and principals with multiple SLOs to weight the results of the SLOs proportionately based on the numbers of students in each SLO.

## Putting Templates, the Approval Process and Scoring all Together

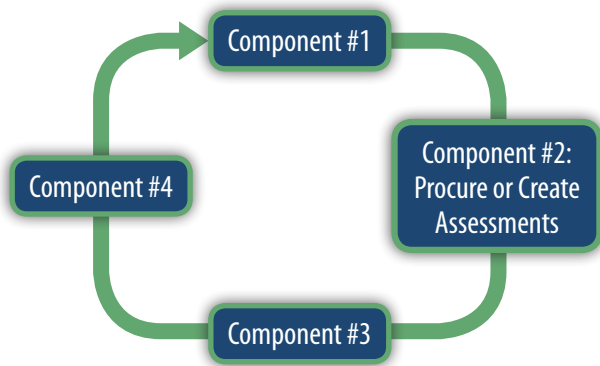
Putting templates, approval processes and scoring guidance together, many jurisdictions, such as Houston and the Washington D.C. Public Schools (DCPS), have created Web-based systems for managing each of these steps and tracking all SLOs in a given year. The templates and approval rubrics and checklists exist as online forms and functions. Districts require teachers and evaluators to enter, approve, and score SLOs at the appropriate time during the school year. These systems support quality control by promoting good practice, making the SLO process manageable and making data readily accessible for purposes of monitoring and continuous improvement.

## Providing Overall Guidance: Sample Guidance Manuals

States and school districts implementing SLOs often produce SLO handbooks, soup-to-nuts guides to how to implement the SLO process. They explain to teachers and evaluators how SLOs fit into the larger framework of teacher evaluation, how to gather baseline data, set objectives, choose assessments, track progress and measure results. The source of many of the materials for this toolkit, they often contain sample SLO templates, scoring frameworks, SLO exemplars, assessment approval checklists and frequently asked questions, among other helpful tools. They seek to ensure consistency and quality across school districts, so that they are implementing SLOs in similar ways. Sampled here are leading examples from **Austin**, **Indiana**, **New York** and **Ohio**.



## Component #2: Procure or Create Assessments and Set Growth and Mastery Targets Using Them



While SLOs address the policy challenge of having student-based performance measures available for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects, they do not solve the problem of having instruments of high quality to measure student learning. Thus, States and school districts must subject the assessments used for SLOs to a rigorous evaluation process, while taking into consideration timeliness, cost, available expertise, resources and quality. Those who use assessments need guidance, therefore, as they either procure existing or develop new assessments to support SLO implementation.

### Guidance for the Selection or Development of High-Quality Assessments

States and districts encourage the use of high-quality assessments in two ways: offering lists of pre-approved assessments or providing criteria and guidance for selecting or in some cases designing them.

The number of and criteria for pre-approved assessments varies by jurisdiction. **Louisiana** provides a list and rank of assessments by tier, identifying tier-one assessments as those produced by the Bayou

State, another State or companies that develop assessments for national consumption; tier two as credible assessments aligned to State standards; and tier three as teacher-developed assessments or those that use indirect measures of student learning. Louisiana recommends that teachers use tier-one assessments when available.

**New York** as well provides a list of pre-approved, third-party assessments. The State requires districts who wish to use a third-party assessment to choose one from the list for applicable teachers or principals. New York also allows districts, regions and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to develop their own assessments for the purposes of SLOs. However, the superintendent must ensure that the assessment is rigorous and comparable across classrooms, in accordance with the commissioner's regulations.

State guidance for assessment development commonly asks implementers of SLOs to examine the validity and reliability of assessments in measuring student mastery, their alignment to district or State standards, the procedures used in administering them and how their results are reported. **Rhode Island** provides a worksheet that teachers or LEAs can complete to justify the use of an existing or teacher-created assessment. **Georgia** has created its own strong guidance for school districts. It requires them to apply a table of specifications and an SLO measure-criteria table to assessments they create for SLOs (districts use the same devices to select pre-existing measures).

At the district level, **Austin** is a leader in providing guidance. For their SLOs, Austin educators choose from six pre-approved district assessments or create an assessment following a set of guidelines provided by the district. Teachers must create these assessments in collaboration with other educators, ensure that they are aligned to State or national standards and cover all the content in the learning objective. The district also includes minimum requirements for rigor and item type to address concerns about validity and reliability.

## Setting Appropriate Student Learning Targets or Objectives

Setting the right targets is one of the most challenging parts of the SLO process. Some States and school districts provide very specific guidance on how to set goals while others allow greater latitude. The challenge of setting targets is that teachers and administrators must give careful thought to whether they have set an objective that is rigorous—yet realistic.

Early adopters sought to achieve rigor and realism by asking teachers to set growth, mastery targets or both by requiring a specified percentage of their students to meet them. Usually, under this approach, an SLO expects 75 percent to 85 percent of students (and sometimes only those who attend class a certain percentage of time) to reach the target.

As the field of SLO implementers expands and jurisdictions address the challenge of setting rigorous yet reasonable goals, targets are becoming inextricably linked to the selected assessments—and standards for setting targets are becoming more nuanced. To promote fairness and consistency across classes, some jurisdictions mandate the target when they use standardized tests for particular subjects and grades, and provide detailed guidance when non-standardized tests are used. **New York** requires the use of specified targets and effectiveness ratings for SLOs in subjects and grades with State-provided growth measures. For all other courses, including those with State assessments that do not have State-provided growth measures, New York allows districts to determine their own targets and scoring processes. The State encourages districts to set expectations for growth based on district expectations and to use as much historical and baseline data as possible to justify student-growth goals.

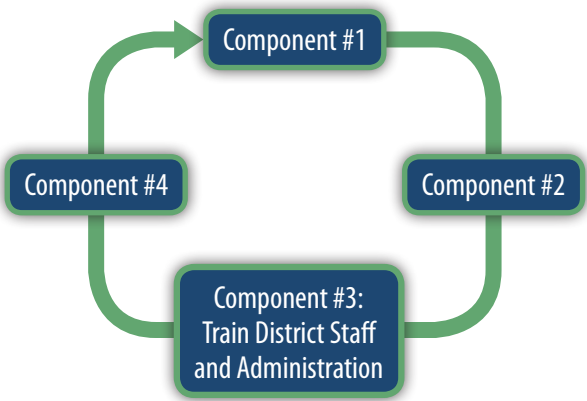
Promoting a nuanced approach, **Indiana** requires educators to establish targets that are tiered or differentiated based on different groupings of students' starting points. The process includes setting the target "mastery" of a subject (that is, scoring 85 points out of 100 on an end of course

assessment) and asking evaluators and teachers to collect baseline data, assess student starting points and place them into preparedness categories (low, medium and high). Then, with guidance provided by the State based on the number of students in each preparedness level, the teacher works with her evaluator to determine the overall percentage of students expected to perform at the mastery level. For example, a "*Highly Effective* teacher should have all students in the high and medium levels of preparedness and most of the students in the low level of preparedness achieve content mastery." Rhode Island also allows for tiered targets.

At the district level, **Houston** provides detailed direction for both assessments and targets. To maximize fairness and comparability, the district has assigned teachers in many grade levels and disciplines assessment and target types (that is, comparative growth, comparative progress and attainment) based on their grade and subject. Where possible, the district uses district-wide assessments and growth or progress oriented targets as opposed to attainment.

**DCPS** also provides comprehensive guidance that supports teachers in writing their targets or goals for specific assessments. The guidance includes suggested assessments, student performance targets in each of the teacher effectiveness levels, and how to weight the different components. To promote the adoption of this guidance and the resulting quality of SLO targets, DCPS prepopulates its aforementioned Web-based tool with the relevant assessment and target guidance for each teacher. Though teachers are free to edit and adapt the prepopulated fields, this strategy has vastly increased the quality of targets submitted from previous years when guidance was not prepopulated.

## Component #3: Train District Staff and Administration



SLOs can pose practical challenges but also can transform school and district cultures. By gathering data and identifying expected student outcomes for every student, teachers and school leaders focus on student learning in ways that can drive strong instructional practice. The SLO community should not underestimate the preparation required to successfully implement SLOs. Teachers, principals and evaluators need training and supporting tools in all stages of the SLO process—from development to scoring—to ensure high-quality implementation. States and districts are now employing several tactics and tools to train their staff.

### Training Modules

Districts and States have developed various training tools to help stakeholders understand the different stages of SLO development and implementation. In addition to traditional handbooks and in-person workshops, some States and LEAs have produced training modules in webinar and video format. **Rhode Island**, for example, offers an hour-long, comprehensive SLO writing webinar that it makes available as a video download through a State portal. **Rhode Island** has also developed a PowerPoint training module intended to supplement instructor-led, in-person training with other evaluators, complete with learning exercises and discussion questions. **Georgia** and **New York** provide training

modules in PowerPoint format as well. New York provides PowerPoint modules for superintendents and district leadership and supplements them with short, focused videos on the SLO process for teachers and principals, how to develop SLOs for specific grades and subjects, and State resources.

**Denver** and **Austin** offer user-friendly accessible videos that stream directly from district websites. They are short, focused videos that are less than ten minutes each. These types of training modules add meaning to and help teachers and administrators use templates and other resources available to support SLO implementation.

### School-Based Training

A few districts have invested in school-based SLO trainers or “champions” to support implementation. Both Austin and **Houston**, for example, pay teachers a small stipend to take on leadership roles in their schools. These trainers and champions come together several times a year, receive training and troubleshoot common challenges. Their districts give them training and facilitation materials to conduct “turnkey” trainings in their own buildings. At the State level, Rhode Island trains a cohort of 20 “intermediate service providers” whom Rhode Island trains and then assigns to districts to support teachers and administrators through the entire evaluation process.

### Sample Annotated SLOs for Training

All States and school districts implementing SLOs have developed SLO exemplars across grade levels and subject areas. The exemplars are used in guidance documents to give teachers and evaluators specific illustrations of what quality SLOs look like. To build on the successful development of these models, however, the RSN plans to increase the utility of SLO models as teaching tools by working with States to annotate both high-quality and lower quality SLOs with explanatory text. These annotated SLOs will contain detailed analyses of what makes specific components of SLOs strong or weak. Interested parties will be able to view these annotated SLOs in an online library to be launched in January 2013.

## **SLO Certification: Guidance Provided by the Reform Support Network**

While it is common for new evaluation systems to require evaluators to become certified observers of professional practice, certification for implementation of student learning objectives is less common. Some jurisdictions require certification for all components of the evaluation framework, including student learning objectives. Houston created a certification process for evaluators that it holds prior to the start of each school year. Evaluators attend three days of training on the full evaluation framework, including about a day covering the SLO process. Training consists of presentations, interactive work and quizzes to check for understanding. To be “certified,” evaluators have to attend the training and pass the quizzes.

As certification is new to many jurisdictions, the RSN has developed preliminary guidance for jurisdictions considering certification.

### **SLO certification over and above extensive training offers jurisdictions the following advantages:**

#### **1. It creates an explicit mechanism to ensure all evaluators have completed their SLO training.**

SLOs are complex, high stakes and new to many educators. If a district or State wants to ensure its evaluators have participated in and demonstrated mastery of a required training sequence for SLOs, it can track successful training completion by attaching it to certification.

#### **2. It raises the quality of SLOs by requiring evaluators to demonstrate competence in key SLO approval skills.**

Implementers of SLOs know that SLO quality varies widely. Certification can be one of several strategies to raise SLO quality by ensuring that evaluators have mastered key characteristics of excellent SLOs, along with strategies to support teachers to write them.

#### **3. It increases the inter-rater consistency of SLO scoring.**

Optimally, any evaluator would score an SLO identically. Consistency of scoring assures fairness for teachers and also provides clarity for teachers about what the system values in student learning growth. Certification can include scoring practice that results in better consistency among evaluators. The **Reform Support Network** has designed a protocol for the training of evaluators to ensure consistency of quality across SLOs, so States and districts can in fact use them as part of certification.

### **If a district determines that it would like to initiate a SLO certification, it might want to consider the following questions:**

#### **1. Will SLO certification be part of the overall evaluator certification or a stand-alone requirement?**

If the jurisdiction also requires observer certification, it can choose either to (a) create an overall evaluator certification requirement that has two parts, both of which must be successfully completed to attain certification, or (b) let each component stay separate, which introduces the possibility that some evaluators may be observation-certified but not SLO-certified, or vice versa.

#### **2. Will the jurisdiction grant a certificate solely on the basis of attendance, or will it require demonstration of SLO administration skills?**

If the jurisdiction’s priority is simply to ensure and track whether evaluators have completed required training, then attendance-based (“sit and get”) certification is appropriate. If the jurisdiction wants to use the certification process to exclude evaluators who do not understand SLOs or who bring a point of view about scoring that differs from the system’s intent, they can build demonstrations or assessments into the certification requirements. Such demonstrations could include, for example, the approval and scoring of sample SLOs and the conduct of mock approval, mid-year and scoring meetings with teachers. Jurisdictions can administer the approval and scoring assessments using online modules.

**3. What will be the pre-practice certification requirements, and what will be the requirements to maintain certification?**

Evaluator behavior can change over time and so the Reform Support Network recommends that certification should not be granted for life. In addition to the requirements for earning an SLO certificate, jurisdictions might specify duration of certification and renewal requirements.

**4. What will be the consequence for non-certification?**

Certification tests can result in pass/fail designations or more differentiated categories—that is, “conditionally certified”—to identify staff members who can evaluate SLOs with additional supervision and need extra support to reach full certification. If a jurisdiction chooses to require SLO certification, then it will have to commit itself to enforcing the consequences: An evaluator who does not achieve the certification cannot administer, approve and score SLOs without support or supervision.

## Component #4: Ensure Continuous Improvement by Refining Systems Based on Feedback and Holding Schools and Districts Accountable for Quality

States and school districts want to continuously improve their SLO systems so that students benefit from effective instruction. To do so, they need to

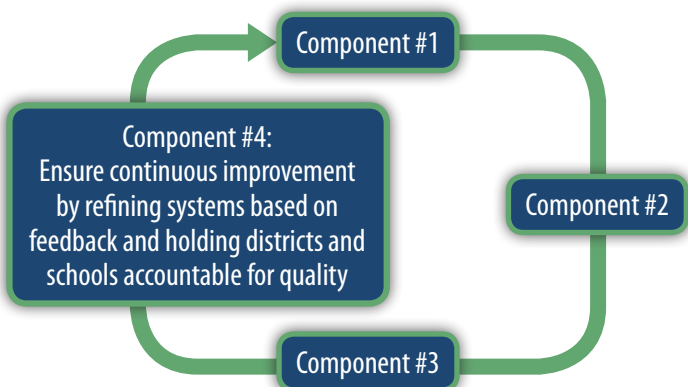
know how teachers and evaluators are implementing SLOs in the field. They need to find out if teachers and evaluators are implementing SLOs of consistent high quality across jurisdictions and that they are scoring results accurately. They need to know this information so that they can target training to evaluators who may not be implementing the SLO process effectively or whose scores may be inflated. They also want this information so they can hold districts and schools accountable for the quality of SLO implementation. Assessing system-wide quality of SLOs and using SLOs in principal evaluation help ensure both continuous improvement and accountability.

### Assessing System-Wide Quality

One challenge implementers of SLOs face is the prospect of monitoring the quality of approved SLOs at a scale that allows for informed judgment and inspires continuous improvement. When States and districts decide if and how to monitor the quality of SLOs that principals and others are approving, there are a number of trade-offs they might consider. Proscriptive monitoring guidance can lead to more compliant SLOs but not necessarily more rigorous ones. In addition, many SLOs to date have been developed in pilots or low-stakes environments so it is unclear how the monitoring process will change when States and districts enforce higher stakes.

In addition to these tensions, several challenges come with successful State or district monitoring of SLO quality. First, some experts have noted that the SLOs used in pilots have not been of uniformly high quality. Second, elementary-school SLOs tend to be stronger than those at the high school level. Variable quality at the secondary level stems in part from the fact that it is difficult to find an individual principal (or even a team of individuals) with enough content knowledge and time to evaluate assessments being used in SLOs for teachers of different grades and subjects.

States and districts should assess their own context before deciding how much time, energy and funds to invest in a monitoring process. If they decide to move forward, they can consider such options as those presented in the next section.



## State Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

States can pursue several strategies to monitor the quality of SLOs that principals are approving:

- Develop, as most States have, State-level quality guidelines or rubrics that all principals must use to approve SLOs.
- Establish an SLO-monitoring and approval committee, as Ohio recommends for all school districts.
- Randomly select a few districts across the State and have a State committee study their SLOs.
- Cross-refer district and school results on SLOs with both observation ratings and large-scale assessment data, a practice to which Rhode Island adheres.

## District Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

Districts can pursue a variety of strategies to monitor the quality of SLOs that principals are approving:

- Set SLOs district-wide in grades and subjects where common assessments exist, providing waiver or opt-out procedures for situations in which a district set goal does not work.
- Develop, as most districts have, district-level quality guidelines or rubrics that all principals must use to approve SLOs
- Embed the monitoring of approvals in regular conversations between principals and their supervisors, so that all principals review a sample of the approved SLOs with their supervisor and answer a set of questions about their quality.
- Establish an SLO-monitoring and approval committee that would study the quality of a few SLOs in every school.

- Encourage every principal to share one high-quality and one weaker SLO for a more extensive district audit.
- Encourage principal teams to work together to audit SLOs and participate in additional training.

## Auditing SLO Scores

With new evaluation systems coming on line in Race to the Top winners and other States, the stakes for the results of student learning objectives are and will remain high. Districts will factor the results into employment and career-milestone decisions they make. In any high-stakes assessment system, it is worth cautioning that States and school districts cannot implement SLOs with the same scientific precision of State-wide standardized tests. However, it is sensible to collect implementation data to refine the existing system and prudent to check for errors and guard against the possibility of cheating. For both purposes, jurisdictions will want to monitor the scoring of SLOs for system improvement and quality control.

This section of the toolkit should help jurisdictions decide whether to audit SLO scoring and provide strategies for how to do so.

### There are three reasons why jurisdictions will want to consider monitoring SLO scoring:

#### 1. To provide feedback for system improvement

A monitoring system will provide important information about the health of the SLO system. It will detect, for example, whether the scoring approach is confusing for evaluators; whether the assessments used by districts are authentic measures of student growth; and whether the system is generating a range of scores, consistent with expectations about the variation in teacher contributions to student growth.

## 2. To check for scoring consistency and accuracy across teachers, evaluators, schools and even States

In most jurisdictions where teachers have latitude to set their SLOs to suit their particular students and subject, it will be difficult to achieve perfect scoring reliability for SLOs. However, if multiple evaluators from different schools scored the same teacher's SLO, the score should be consistent across evaluators. Furthermore, most experts believe that SLO scores should correlate to some degree with observation ratings and value-added or growth measures where available. It is inevitable, especially in systems that require the averaging of several SLO scores or other mathematical calculations, evaluators will make mistakes. A sound system for monitoring SLO scoring, along with good training for evaluators, is a key strategy for maximizing scoring reliability and accuracy.

## 3. To detect and deter cheating

The focus of an auditing system should be on continuous improvement; however some States have expressed concerns about the potential for cheating. A well-designed approach for monitoring scoring will not catch all instances of assessment outcome manipulation, but it should detect some and will deter others.

Jurisdictions have in fact deployed strategies to discourage SLO cheating. Chief among these are collaborative (Rhode Island) or district (Georgia) goal-setting and having teachers sign assurances that they will not manipulate assessment results for their SLOs (Georgia).

There are at least two main approaches to monitoring SLO scoring. The first is to analyze SLO scores across the jurisdiction to identify overall patterns, differences among schools and within subjects. States or districts can also cross-tabulate SLO results with value-added scores (when available) and performance-observation scores. Administrators should examine outliers more closely to understand the basis for the differences.

The second approach, which can be used concurrently, is to examine a random sampling of scored SLOs with their associated evidence to verify the score. States and school districts can set an annual target of verifying 1 to 5 percent of all scores.

In all systems, the monitoring process can also serve to improve the system. Findings may warrant changes in the SLO system, changes in training or increased communication about the benefits for children of thoughtful and authentic goal setting.

## Using SLOs in Principal Evaluation: Guidance Provided by the RSN and Supported by State-Developed Tools

Educator evaluation systems can base a portion of a principal's evaluation on how well he or she implements the SLO component of a new teacher evaluation system and how well the teachers she supervises perform. These systems can use both implementation and outcome-based metrics for this purpose. A note of caution about the use of these metrics is necessary, however. While this emphasis on SLOs in evaluation can provide an incentive for principals to help teachers reach their goals, they may also provide an incentive for principals to lower expectations or inflate teacher scores to improve their own evaluation ratings. To combat this potential challenge, school districts and States where appropriate can consider requiring someone other than the principal to approve or score SLOs, a practice in which **Ohio** engages. Guidance issued by Ohio suggests that districts can use an aggregate measure of all teachers' SLOs to evaluate principals. If a district chooses this option, however, the administrator cannot be the sole approver or scorer of teacher SLOs.

## Implementation-Based Metrics

Implementation metrics assess how effectively a principal is implementing the SLO process. When using these metrics, school districts can gather data through surveys and review randomly sampled SLOs.

**Indiana** has established such metrics and includes them in its principal practice rubric. **Additional metrics can include the percentage of teachers who can do the following:**

- Demonstrate an understanding of the SLO process
- Complete all components of the SLO process
- Believe their principal has implemented the SLO process well (for example, “Do you think your principal helped you set the right goals?”)
- Agree that their approved SLO(s) meets district expectations
- Believe their interactions with their principal were of high quality

**Possible survey questions that districts can administer electronically or through other means include:**

### 1. Binary Survey Questions (Yes/No)

- My principal was able to explain the SLO scoring process to me.
- My principal and I discussed the assessments chosen for my SLOs.
- My principal was able to answer my questions about setting student growth goals to my satisfaction.
- My principal discussed strategies with me to help achieve my SLO targets.
- My principal established ways to support my efforts to promote student learning.

### 2. Scaled Survey questions

Select your level of agreement with the following Statements.

(Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree)

- My principal provided clear expectations and guidance for developing my SLOs.

- My principal was able to address my questions or concerns as I was developing my SLOs.
- My principal was helpful in selecting an appropriate assessment for my SLOs.
- My principal is knowledgeable about the SLO scoring process.
- My principal provided the appropriate supports to help me achieve my SLO targets.

## Outcomes-Based Metrics

These metrics assess the outcome of the SLO process; including what percentage of teachers meet their SLO goals.

**Possible outcome-based metrics include the percentage or number of teachers who:**

- Meet their SLO goals at the end of the year
- Complete their mid-term conferences
- Have approved SLOs that meet standards for SLO proficiency established by State or local authorities
- Whose outcomes match other measures (for example, student surveys or observations)

A number of States have proposed the use of outcome measures. In Connecticut, teacher effectiveness—as measured by an aggregation of teachers’ SLOs—accounts for 5 percent of an administrator’s evaluation.

Including SLOs in the principal evaluation process provides principals and other evaluators with information about how to improve their practice. It also provides school districts with system-wide information about how well SLO implementation is going in the field. School districts committed to continuous improvement can use this information to deliver training where appropriate and make adjustments to their SLO systems as necessary.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, SLOs are an evolving practice that offers promise for evaluating the contributions teachers make to student learning. This process of setting rigorous yet attainable goals, implementing assessments aligned to the goals, and monitoring and evaluating progress builds strong instruction and can be adapted to teachers of all grades and subjects. However, implementing SLO systems is complex, and it relies on evaluator and teacher judgment. Although states and school districts should not expect their SLOs to achieve the same sort of scientific validity and reliability that standardized state assessments produce, fairness and comparability across teachers and schools are critical elements for high-stakes use of SLOs. This toolkit describes emerging practices and tools for ensuring quality implementation of SLOs which states and districts can adapt and build upon for their own systems. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the RSN will continue to update the toolkit as the field gains greater insight and develops even stronger approaches.

# Tool Box

## Introduction

- RSN SLO Background

## Component #1: Provide Guidance, Templates and Tools to Develop, Approve and Score SLOs

### *SLO Development Templates*

- Denver SLO Template
- New York SLO Template
- Louisiana SLO Template
- Indiana SLO Template

### *Approving the SLO: SLO Approval Rubrics or Checklists*

- Denver SLO Approval Rubric
- Austin SLO Approval Rubric
- Rhode Island SLO Approval Checklist
- Indiana SLO Approval Checklist
- Ohio SLO Approval Checklist
- Louisiana SLO Approval Checklist
- RSN SLO Approval Checklist

### *Scoring the SLO: SLO Scoring Guidance*

- Rhode Island SLO Scoring Guidance
- New York SLO Scoring Guidance
- Ohio SLO Scoring Calculator
- Louisiana SLO Scoring Guidance
- Georgia SLO Scoring Guidance
- Indiana SLO Scoring Guidance

### *Providing Overall Guidance: Sample Guidance Manuals*

- Austin SLO Guidance Manual
- Indiana SLO Guidance Manual
- New York SLO Guidance Manual
- Ohio SLO Guidance Manual

## Component #2: Procure or Create Assessments and Set Growth and Mastery Targets Using Them

### *Guidance for the Selection or Development of High-Quality Assessments*

- Louisiana SLO Assessment Guidelines
- New York Approved SLO Assessment List
- Rhode Island SLO Assessment Worksheet
- Georgia SLO Assessment Measure-Criteria Table
- Austin SLO Assessment Guidelines

# Tool Box

## *Setting Appropriate Student Learning Targets or Objectives*

- New York SLO Growth Goal Setting Guidance
- Indiana Tiered SLO Target Setting Guidance
- Houston Student Progress Goal Setting Guidance
- DC SLO Assessment and Target Guidance

## **Component #3: Train District**

### *Training Modules*

- Rhode Island SLO Writing Webinar
- Rhode Island SLO Training Module PowerPoint
- Georgia SLO Training Module PowerPoint
- New York SLO Training Module Website
- Denver SLO Training Module Video
- Austin SLO Training Module Video

### *School-Based Training*

- Houston SLO Campus Learning Session

### *SLO Certification: Guidance Provided by the Reform Support Network*

- RSN SLO Evaluator Protocol for Establishing Consistent Quality

## **Component #4: Ensure Continuous Improvement by Refining Systems Based on Feedback and Holding Schools and Districts Accountable for Quality**

### *Using SLOs in Principal Evaluation: Guidance Provided by the RSN and Supported by State-Developed Tools*

- Ohio Principal Evaluation Guidance
- Indiana Principal Practice Rubric

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