



VCS

Vicksburg Community Schools

Traditions In Excellence

The SLO Process in Vicksburg Community Schools

Charles Glaes, Superintendent

Our District, Vicksburg Community Schools, is utilizing Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for the first time this year, 2015-16. Introducing the process raised blood pressure in some staff, but has gone surprisingly well, especially given the tumultuous events which led to the transition.

We were very frustrated in our attempts to meet the state's student growth requirement. Our 2014-15 attempt created by the administration, using STAR Reading and Math, along with home grown assessments in Science and Social Studies, had not gone well, resulting in sagging confidence and morale. Teachers were feeling overwhelmed with their ongoing professional development and work on identifying priority standards, unpacking, developing scales, and gearing up to write assessments. The thought of changing major district assessments in order to meet state growth measure requirements felt like a huge distraction.

In the spring we reached out to Doug Greer, at Ottawa Area ISD for assistance in determining whether Delta Math, which we had been using, could double as a growth measure. Doug met with us in early June 2015 to answer our questions and also shared Student Learning Objectives in which educators on educator teams establish learning targets for groups of student based on available data, monitor growth, and determine progress. The logic of the approach shone through immediately; the process directly mirrored the work our teachers had been doing in their curriculum development and PLC work, as SLO development requires educators to:

- review standards
- identify core concepts and student needs
- set goals for students
- monitor student progress
- examine outcome data and determine next steps

We invited teacher union representatives to our next meeting in July 2015. Our union president had been researching alternatives after the mess we had endured together. When she heard we were looking into SLOs, she was very intrigued. We reviewed the SLO examples developed by Ottawa Area ISD, along with our own District Delta Math growth data. Interest grew as we saw that a well-developed process with easy to use templates which we could utilize with available data already existed. We agreed that teachers would recognize the process meshed with the essential standards tasks they were doing, and decided to move forward and work together to answer the questions and resolve the problems in order to roll out SLOs in the fall of 2015.

Acknowledging our collaborative work, we announced to staff at our preservice meeting in August that we would initiate the SLO process, but would reduce the weight of the resulting student growth score to 5% of the evaluation as we worked through the process for the first time together. Teachers who had been involved spoke in support when we went to staff meetings at each building in September to provide a more in-depth overview. We stressed that this was not another new thing, pointing out the



direct tie to our existing priorities, and showed that the templates were easy to complete using information they were already gathering.

We had decided that we would limit the scope of our initial roll-out to three options:

- Math
- Reading
- An individually defined/department goal

Principals continued to discuss at staff meetings and to meet with departments and grade level groups to explain and work through goal development and approval. During those meetings, departments, particularly at the secondary level, and non-core teachers expressed a desire to develop SLOs specific to their curriculum, so the scope was quickly expanded. Meanwhile, as buildings completed the development and approval process, a steering committee, comprised of administration and teacher volunteers, met to complete development of the process, including Mid-Course Check In, Final Review of SLO Scoring and Attainment, and Discussion on Summative Rating and Impact on Performance.

By this time, we had another hurdle to address. The legislature finally reached agreement on teacher evaluation reform, setting the weight of student growth at 25%. As I had declared we would reduce the weight on the SLO score in this development year to just 5%, we had to come up with a plan for the additional 20% weight.

The steering committee determined how to score SLO student growth and to ask teachers to document the SLO process, including how they used the PLC process to achieve the student learning objective.

The steering committee shifted its perspective. As state law requires we must measure student growth and assessment data, and federal law requires program evaluation, and MDE states we must measure student impact and teacher implementation, we determined to assess the fidelity of implementation of the SLO process in order to meet the additional 20%. Rubrics were developed for both the student growth/impact and process components. The implementation process was divided into four categories worth 5% each:

- Dialogue through the PLC and SLO process with peers and administration.
- What do we expect students to learn?
- How do we know students have learned the essential content?
- How do we respond when students learn or don't learn the essential content?

Rubric language was closely tied to the Danielson language in our evaluation model, and DuFour and Marzano statements tied to our PLC and standards development processes. Lists of evidence already available are being collected which could be used to document the process were also developed.

Another building tour to explain scoring and process documentation is scheduled for February 2016. Steering Committee members' roles in those meetings have been defined, and follow-up meetings with principals will be scheduled.

While I am sure that some staff will be unhappy or overwhelmed at the thought of documenting yet another function, we believe it is intuitive and aligned to their ongoing work; clearly not another new thing! More importantly, the SLO process is well under way, as principals are regularly reviewing examples with staff of evidence to bring to Mid-Course check-ins to document progress, and discussing monitoring and adjusting. PLC discussions are more clearly focusing on expected learning, looking for evidence of learning, responding to student need and improving achievement. There seem to be clearer expectations and far less confusion, which is a huge gain already!