

### **What are Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)?**

A Student Learning Objective, or SLO, is an academic goal set for an educator's students at the start of a course. It represents the most important learning that is aligned to Common Core, State, or national standards, as well as any other school and district/BOCES priorities. The goals must be specific and measurable, based on available prior student learning data. This baseline data may come from a variety of sources such as pre-tests/pre-assessments and/or a student's prior academic history. Educators' scores are based upon the degree to which the goals were attained, as evidenced by student academic performance at the end of the course. This end-of-course-performance can be captured in a variety of ways, such as through performance tasks, extended essay responses, and/or other authentic application of skills.

Educators set SLOs following the processes determined locally by their districts. In most cases, the educator will propose an SLO with input and approval from his or her principal or supervisor at the beginning of the school year. SLOs should be developed using as much available student data as possible and should be created to be ambitious but achievable.

### **What is the Value in Using SLOs?**

The development of SLOs encourages educators to focus and align instruction with district/BOCES and school priorities, goals, and academic improvement plans. Setting long-term goals allows educators to plan backwards from a vision of student success. Research indicates that setting rigorous and ambitious learning goals, combined with the purposeful use of data through both formal and informal assessments, leads to higher academic performance by students.

Many educators already set academic goals for students on a regular basis and see it as an integral part of their practice. For other educators, setting and evaluating SLOs will be a shift in practice and will require new types of learning, collaboration, and use of data that might be challenging at first. Ultimately, the result of this shift in practice will lead to more purposeful instruction, closer monitoring of student progress, and greater student growth.

Teachers and administrators value SLOs as evidence of educator impact on student performance in all grades and subject areas. New York State's SLO process is tailored to the specific requirements of our teacher and principal evaluation system. We expect our approach will have significant instructional benefit by encouraging educators to be systematic and strategic in their instructional decisions, and lead to improved educator and student performance. Done thoughtfully and collaboratively, the SLO process will lead to an increase in the quality of discussions happening in Districts, schools, and classrooms across the state that surround student growth and learning, clearer indications of when and how to adjust instruction to meet students' needs, and more strategic planning of professional development efforts.

### **Who has SLOs?**

All educators must be evaluated, in part, based on student growth on State assessments or other comparable measures when State assessments are not utilized. Generally, teachers and principals responsible for grades 4-8 ELA and/or Math and high school principals (with all grades 9-12) will receive a State-provided growth score based on the State assessments. However, for the majority of educators (~80%), including those who don't meet the minimum requirements for a State-provided growth score, students' academic growth is captured using Student Learning Objectives (SLOs).

In the past, our system only provided data about student achievement to teachers of courses with State assessments. We now have a system that offers a way for districts and buildings to set goals and capture growth for students in any subject area.

### **What Assessments are Used with SLOs?**

The decisions made within each SLO, many of which are defined in the district/BOCES' approved APPR plan, are made locally in accordance with applicable state guidelines. The SLO includes information around the level of knowledge and skills students have at the beginning of a course, as well as defines the level of student performance that is expected at the end of a course. For those educators who teach courses without a state assessment, their district may determine they will measure student performance with a district, regional, or BOCES- developed assessment or a third party assessment from the State's approved list. If the assessment is developed locally – such as a performance task or a series of essay responses – the assessment should offer true indications of attainment of the standards of the course/subject. Improving the reliability and validity of the assessments developed locally will be an ongoing process for districts. The *Quality Control Toolkit for Student Learning Objectives* provided by the Reform Support Network states the following:

States and school districts cannot expect their SLOs to yield the same scientific validity and reliability that standardized State assessments produce. That is simply not possible. Nevertheless, there is strong precedent in other fields for using goal setting in a consistent and credible manner. Employers and employees in many American industries sit down together annually to set objectives and identify 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 promote 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, including teachers, should expect a fair, rigorous and high-quality process of setting objectives and implementing them. However, it is important to remember that SLOs are not intended to be psychometrically-grounded growth measures. As the Center for Assessment clarifies, “the role of student growth is embedded within the process of establishing performance targets for groups of students depending on some rough sense of where they start, rather than in the technical measurement of change in student performance.”<sup>1</sup> (2012, p. 4)

### **Sample Decisions Made Through the Development of SLOs**

Student Learning Objectives are being utilized in a variety of classrooms with very diverse curriculums. For example, a district/BOCES may be setting SLOs for students of varying developmental stages, including elementary math, middle school social studies, high school music, or career and technical education courses. Each of these instructional settings is unique in design and expectations. The flexibility within the required components of an SLO allows districts/BOCES to tailor each academic goal to the specific needs of the students and nature of the course.

One of the first decisions made during the development of an SLO is what academic content should be prioritized and measured. Students in middle school social studies for example are acquiring knowledge and skills in a variety of ways. Working with multi-media resources and primary and

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<sup>1</sup> Marion et al. Considerations for Analyzing Educators Contributions to Student Learning in Non-Tests Grades and Subjects with a Focus on Student Learning Objectives, Center for Assessment, May 2012, p.2

secondary sources of information require students to demonstrate not only content-knowledge, but also Common Core- aligned literacy skills as well. Instruction and assessments used to grow and provide evidence of these cross-discipline skills may require students to not only answer multiple choice questions, but to write short or extended responses to questions that require critical thinking and evidence-based answers. SLOs often times will prioritize standards and skills from many different sources to best capture the complex learning structures found within courses.

SLOs are meant to capture student learning from the beginning of a course through to the end. In order to more accurately set individualized targets for student learning, educators may look at multiple sources of student performance to better understand the knowledge and skills students are entering with. For example, a district may decide to use information collected during a one-on-one work session with a student, in addition to looking at that student's math performance in previous years to determine what level of preparedness a student brings with them to the second grade math curriculum. Using multiple types of baseline information, in some cases including a pre-assessment, will help a teacher and principal set appropriate goals for each student. Districts/BOCES must also select appropriate ways to measure students' academic growth at the end of a course. In some cases the end of course assessment will be a State exam, but in most cases districts will need to decide whether to use an approved third-party assessment, or utilize a regional or district created assessment. It is important to remember that assessments used to capture students' growth over the course of the year should be closely aligned to the knowledge, skills, and expectations found within the prioritized learning content of the SLO.

Finally, SLOs are meant to guide and support the authentic instruction happening within a course. Many courses rest heavily on student application and performance such as high school music and/or career and technical education courses. In these, and similar cases, a district/BOCES may choose to design/select assessments that capture the authentic student application of the knowledge and skills gained over the course of instruction. The student performances and/or work products should be assessed against a series of developed and vetted criteria that are aligned with the prioritized standards.

Districts/BOCES should be challenging themselves through the decisions made within the development of Student Learning Objectives to ensure that students are better prepared for college and career pathways. Careful consideration should be taken in the selection and/or design of priority content, assessments, and target setting models used across grade and subject areas. As stated earlier, SLOs are a framework that can guide the learning of all students in all subjects. Ongoing conversation centered on instruction and student learning are integral components of successful SLO implementation.

### **Support from NYSED**

The development of Student Learning Objectives is an evolutionary process, and the Department recognizes that there is much to be learned from the first full year of implementation across New York. Resources found on EngageNY are meant to build upon the experiences and reflections gained from the 2012-13 school year and provide educators with additional frames of reference as they work to enhance the implementation of SLOs in the 2013-14 school year. Be sure to pay extra attention to the Student Learning Objective Guidance Document, SLO Road Map, the series of introductory webinars, and the annotated field samples. These and other resources can be found here:

<https://www.engageny.org/resource/student-learning-objectives/>