

SLOs FOR TEACHERS FAQ

Student Learning Objectives – Frequently Asked Questions

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Student Learning Objectives – Frequently Asked Questions

INTRODUCTION

What are Student Learning Objectives?

Q: What are SLOs?

A: SLOs are ambitious, standards-based learning goals for students. They are a collection of effective best-instruction practices centered on addressing four questions:

1. What is important for my students to learn? (Where are my students going?)
 - a. This question facilitates a deep understanding and informed prioritization of the standards, knowledge and skills that should be mastered in the course
2. Where are my students starting?
 - a. Students' initial preparedness (mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the course) is determined using a body of baseline assessments
3. Where are my students now (throughout the year)?
 - a. Ongoing progress monitoring through formative assessment, analysis and DDI, and then making instructional shifts provides a continuous feedback loop of relevant, rigorous instruction
4. Where did my students finish?
 - a. Students' end of course mastery of standards is determined, using a course-long body of assessments, to understand their growth for the course

Purpose

Q: Why is DPS doing this?

A: Student Learning Objectives (SLO) are embedded in everyday teaching and learning. The goal of Student Learning Objectives are to focus teachers on key standards being taught and support the design and use of high quality assessments to measure student progress toward mastery of those standards. Thus, SLOs help teachers focus on pedagogical practices that will yield greater student growth on critical learning outcomes.

Q: Why are we focusing on assessment rather than instruction?

A: Rather than view assessment and instruction as independent and separate activities, they should be interwoven throughout the instructional period. Gaining clear and specific data on students' progress towards mastery at frequent intervals is essential for adjusting instruction to meet students' needs. SLOs move away from a traditional assessment model of pre- and post-tests by emphasizing the need to monitor students' individual progress using a variety of items and tasks throughout the span of instruction.

Q: We are a high achieving school. Why do we have to do this process?

A: SLOs are designed to build upon current success and enable demonstration of growth in relation to students' preparedness levels at the beginning of the course. While grounded in standards, an increase in rigor applicable to students' skills and knowledge should be reflected in the Learning Progression Rubric.

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Q: Is DPS the only district doing SLOs or is this something educators are doing elsewhere?

A: SLOs are being implemented in districts across Colorado and across the United States. Many districts are using our SGO model as a basis for their SLO model because their schools have never had an objective setting process in place before. Because DPS has had SGOs in place for over a decade, we are using what we learned from the SGO system to make the new SLO system better align with what is happening with our teachers and students here in DPS. We believe the focus on a body of evidence, instead of just one assessment, is critical to better monitoring student progress.

SLOs and LEAP

Q: Has this been negotiated with DCTA?

A: As with all of the components of LEAP, DPS has worked closely with DCTA to develop the SLO Process.

Q: How will SLOs impact my LEAP evaluation?

A: Colorado legislation (SB 191) dictates that 50% of a teacher’s evaluation must be based on student growth. DPS has decided that SLOs are our most authentic link between effective instruction in the classroom and student growth. As such they are the largest component of the student growth portion of evaluation. The percentage that SLOs contribute to your evaluation depends on whether you are connected to student growth as measured by CMAS state assessments. See the table below.

	Teachers with CMAS Growth measures (grades 4-9 math and literacy)	Teachers without CMAS Growth measures	All New Teachers
SLOs	30%	40%	50%
CMAS Growth	10%		
Collective measure – School Growth	10%	10%	

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Timeline

Q: What are the deadlines for teachers in submitting information in the SLO application?

A: Each teacher’s timeline will differ depending on the length of their courses and the frequency of contact with students. Below is a table that covers nearly all teachers/SSPs.

	Teachers with SLO in year-long course	Teachers with SLO in semester 1 course	Teachers with limited contact time in year long course	Teachers with limited contact time in 1 semester course
Teacher submits long term goal phase	September 29	September 29	October 31	October 31
Evaluator approves long term goal phase	October 31	October 31	Friday before Thanksgiving break	Friday before Thanksgiving break
Optional, mid-year SLO data entry	An optional mid-year data entry page is provided in the SLO Application. School leaders determine the expectation for its use.			
Teacher submits end of course phase*	1 week before EOY LEAP conversation	January 31	1 week before EOY LEAP conversation	January 31
Evaluator approves end of course phase	By EOY LEAP conversation	February 28	By EOY LEAP conversation	February 28

*School leaders determine specific end of course deadlines for their schools. These should be communicated to teachers well in advance.

The long term goal phase includes the Objective Statement, Performance Criteria, Learning Progression Rubric, Baseline Data and Baseline Preparedness levels. The end of course phase includes students’ end of course Expectation Levels for each Objective.

If a teacher only has semester courses, ARE strongly recommends SLOs are completed during the first semester. While the 2nd semester is longer, this is more than outweighed by the fact that data for EOY Expectation levels is due in early May and much of April is potentially disrupted by state testing. First semester SLOs can extend through the end of December and data can be submitted in January.

Please note that these deadlines are generic and designed to meet the needs of our large school district, which has many different scheduling configurations and structures. As such, they are deadlines for official submission of materials, not necessarily timelines for when teachers and school leaders should be doing the work. We strongly encourage teachers to determine baseline preparedness as quickly as possible at the beginning of a course, regardless of the data-entry deadline.

Q: What are the deadlines for evaluators in approving information in the SLO application?

A: See the table above.

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Q: What if I go on leave?

A: If a teacher goes on leave, the teacher should still complete at least one Objective and all components of the SLO. The teacher and school leader should adjust the SLOs as necessary for the teacher's leave situation. For example, the Objective Statement should reflect student growth appropriate for the time frame. The teacher and school leader should also work together to ensure that the teacher submits, and the evaluator approves, each of the part of the SLO in the SLO application. Depending on the timing of the leave, these submissions and approvals may need to occur before or after the deadlines. It is the teacher's responsibility to maintain documentation of student growth data in relation to each Objective.

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SUPPORT

Q: Where can I find help?

A: Your best source for help is going to be your immediate team of educational professionals who truly know your individual context and similar students' needs. Based on your individual school, your support team could be comprised of a combination of a Teacher Effectiveness Coach, a Teacher Leader, and the School Leadership Team. In addition, where appropriate, the School Intervention Team can be a helpful resource when you are developing your Baseline Groups. You should also check out the SLO website, which includes links to various resources, including the SLO Handbook.

Q: What training are my school leaders getting?

A: School leaders have been receiving training on for the past two years, and they will continue to receive training and support throughout the school year in their network meetings as well as additional support sessions from the SLO team in ARE via webinars.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Q: Are there guidance documents available?

A: There are a variety of resources available on the [SLO webpage](#). The resources currently available on the SLO webpage include an SLO Handbook with guidelines for each step in the process, various timelines, a link to the SLO Resource Bank, and user guides for the SLO Application.

Q: Can DPS develop a tracker that pulls data from Schoolnet, IC, Renaissance Learning, Oasis, Aimsweb, Parent/Teacher Portal, any additional programs schools may use to gather data?

A: While desirable, this is not currently feasible. The SLO Team is working with DoTS to integrate data collection and tracking resources as soon as possible. It is important that teachers work in collaboration with their school leader and teams to determine the most appropriate method for gathering and tracking data related to their SLO.

SLO PROCESS STEPS

SLO process overview

Q: What does a sample SLO look like?

A: The model SLO Resource Bank can be found online at a link on the [SLO webpage](#). Teachers may also access model SLOs in the SLO Application when they log in to submit their information.

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Q: How many SLOs do I need to set?

A: Teachers are required to complete 1 SLO, and may complete a second SLO, if they choose to. If a teacher's first SLO has less than 10 students assigned baseline preparedness levels, the teacher is required to complete a second SLO. SSPs are required to complete 2 SLOs. This includes all components of the SLO in collaboration with your team and school leaders.

Q: Why would I complete two SLOs if I'm only required to do one?

A: Completing two SLOs allows a teacher to include more students in their SLOs. This reduces the chance that one student may negatively impact their evaluation. Additionally, completing a second SLO allows for the SLO process to be reflective of broader scope of a teacher's instructional craft. A teacher could include a different class (choosing an Algebra 1 course for one SLO and an Algebra 2 course for a second SLO), or a teacher could include standards from a different content area (an elementary teacher having one SLO on reading standards and a second SLO on mathematics standards).

Q: Can I use the same Objective Statement for two different class sections?

A: No, if a teacher uses one Objective Statement for two different class sections, both sections should be included in *one* SLO. However, a teacher may have two different Objectives (e.g., one reading and one writing), but track the same class of students for both. This counts as *two* SLOs.

Q: What do SLOs look like for teachers who may only have a group of students for a semester, every other week, etc.?

A: Each of the steps of the SLO process should be modified as necessary for teachers who either see students for a shorter period of time and/or have infrequent contact with students. For instance, the knowledge and skills reflected in the Objective Statement should be feasible and ambitious for the amount of contact time that a teacher has with his/her students. Similarly, the number of data points used in the Baseline Data and Body of Evidence needs to reflect what is realistic for the teacher.

Selection of course section(s) or content area

Q: If I teach at several schools, which school(s) should I use as the basis for my SLO work?

A: SLOs are required to pertain to work in the school where your LEAP evaluator is located.

Q: Are teachers required to write Objective Statements for a particular content area or course?

A: Teachers should write SLOs that address the instructional material they deliver to students. The primary focus of an SLO should not be in a content area in which they are not teaching. SLOs can support other content areas and support school-wide goals, (particularly literacy), but the primary focus on an SLO should be the standards knowledge and skills of the content of the course. For teachers who teach in multiple content areas, teachers should collaborate with their team and school leader to make an appropriate selection. It is recommended that teachers choose a course/class for their SLO that: is most representative of their entire student roster; has the most potential for impact (i.e. Algebra 1 rather than Calculus); best represents or aligns with a school focus. Teachers must select a particular course or section that contains at a minimum of 10-15 students. In addition, teachers should be able to articulate a clear, thorough, and strong rationale for their selection. Once a particular class is selected, *all* students in that class must be accounted for in the Baseline Preparedness Levels.

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Q: Do teachers need to align their Objective Statements to the school’s UIP?

A: It is recommended that Objective Statements support a school’s UIP where appropriate. Teachers should collaborate with their data team and school leader when writing their Objective Statements to determine how they may best support the school’s UIP. It is crucial, however, that Objective Statements honor the standards and curriculum of the teacher’s subject area. Thus, it is highly unlikely that the same Objective Statement would be applicable to every teacher in the building; adjustments will need to be made based on the standards of each subject area. For example, a writing objective would not honor the standards of a music course; rather, a more appropriate objective in music would require students not only to perform music, but also to articulate their conceptual understanding of music through speaking and writing.

Q: What about secondary teachers? Do they set their SLOs for one course? One period?

A: It is recommended that all teachers set their Objective Statements in collaboration with their teams and school leader. It is recommended that teachers choose a course/class for their SLO that: is most representative of their entire student roster; has the most potential for impact (i.e. Algebra 1 rather than Calculus); best represents or aligns with a school focus. Teachers must select a particular course or section that contains at a minimum of 10-15 students. Once a particular class is selected, *all* students in that class must be accounted for in the Baseline Preparedness Levels.

Collaboration

Q: My data team consists of teachers who teach the same content area and grade. Should we use the same Objective Statements?

A: We strongly recommend that you and your team members use the same Objective Statements. This will ensure that you collaboratively select standards and/or grade level expectations for each Objective Statement that you all believe reflect knowledge and/or skills critical for students’ success and that span the duration of the course. Setting objectives in teams allows for greater consistency within a school and across the district. Furthermore, this will enable greater collaboration throughout the SLO process, particularly in the design/selection and scoring of assessments. This will promote greater reliability in the data and your outcomes.

Q: When teachers create an Objective Statement as a team, can we then modify/tailor it to fit what we do in our own classrooms?

A: Your Objective Statement should be nearly the same as other team members, as well as the assessments and progress monitoring tasks you use along the way. However, you will categorize your own students based on their needs in Baseline Levels of Preparedness component, as well as articulate the growth of your own students in the End of Course Expectation Levels.

Create an Objective Statement

Q: What does a strong Objective Statement look like?

A: The Objective Statement is generally comprised of multiple standards and/or grade level expectations and is a general description of what students will know and be able to do at the end of the course. It includes a language

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domain and a language function. The standards and/or grade level expectations should reflect knowledge and/or skills critical for students' success in the current courses and future courses, and that span the duration of the course. The Objective Statement should be written in the form "All students will be able to..." For example, an Objective Statement for US History may say, "All students will be able to utilize the historical method of inquiry to analyze and explain, through oral presentation and evidence-based writing, historical concepts including continuity and change, and cause and effect over time." This Objective encompasses several standards and spans multiple lesson and unit objectives.

Q: What standards and/or grade level expectations should teachers use to write their Objective Statement?

A: The standards and/or grade level expectations selected should directly reflect the content and language being taught and assessed. Therefore, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Colorado Academic Standards (CAS), Career and Technical Education Standards (CTE), World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) and NextGen should be consulted along with DPS Essential Learning Goals (ELGs), Scope and Sequence and Assessment Blueprints. Content coordinators are also providing guidance on identifying standards and/or grade level expectations for Objective Statements. This guidance is available in the SLO Handbook.

Q: If teachers only use a few standards and/or grade level expectations when writing their Objective Statements, won't they be neglecting other important standards?

A: An SLO should address: 1) the most important standards of a course, 2) standards that require mastery of other grade-level standards before mastering those of the SLO, and 3) standards that are the culmination of an entire year (or whatever the duration of the course) of rigorous learning in an environment of excellent instruction. It should not be possible to attain proficiency on an SLO in a single unit of a multi-unit course; it should take most of the course, mastering successive grade-level standards, to attain proficiency of the SLO. Crafted in this manner, as a culmination of an entire course, an SLO can reflect a large segment of the curriculum, rather than implicitly narrowing the curriculum. Focusing instructional practices solely on the specific standards of an SLO should not be possible if the SLO is a culmination of a year of rigorous instruction and also would not be in the best interest of the students.

Q: How should a teacher team decide whether an Objective Statement should be written using one standard or multiple standards?

A: An Objective Statement should address the most important concepts and skills of the course, which requires an entire course to master. Thus, the Objective Statement and Learning Progression should be comprised of multiple standards. In an SLO, this might be best indicated by multiple sub-standards within the most important broad standard.

Q: Is there a tension between drafting an Objective Statement that is not too broad or too narrow?

A: Objective Statements should be broad enough to span the course and yet specific enough so that progress towards them can be measured periodically throughout the course. When writing their Performance Criteria, teachers may find it necessary to revise their Objective Statement. However, once your Performance Criteria are written, you should not need to modify your Objective Statement.

Q: Can principals mandate that teachers set particular Objective Statements?

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A: While teachers are not required to set particular Objective Statements, the process is meant to be a collaborative effort among team members and their school leaders. Participants should reach a consensus on appropriate Objective Statements. Teachers should be utilizing the standards for their content and grade level as the basis for their Objective Statement.

Q: Will there be sample Objective Statements for teachers to view before they attempt to write their own?

A: Yes, we have a sample bank of Objective Statements that were created collaboratively by the SLO team, Curriculum and Instruction, and ELA. These are posted on the SLO website as well as preloaded into the SLO Application.

Q: What if the majority of my students are already proficient on grade-level standards?

A: SLOs are meant to directly address the needs of your student population. In collaboration with your data team and school leader, you should determine how to best meet the needs of your students if data indicates they are already proficient on grade level standards at the Baseline. You may want to focus on the depth of knowledge and rigor for a particular set of standards, and you may want to consult corresponding standards for the following grade levels.

Q: Should teachers include a mathematical practice as part of their Objective?

A: Ye! SLOs focused on mathematics should include at least one mathematical practice, in addition to mathematical content standards, for each Objective Statement you write in the content area of math.

Q: Why are Objectives not based on where students are in a class?

A: SLOs are structured so that teachers start out by thinking about what *all* students should be able to do and know by the end of their course in order to be successful in the future. After determining students' preparedness levels, the teachers may find it necessary to modify their Objective to better suit the needs of the students in the class. It should be emphasized that the SLO process is not by nature linear; rather it is an iterative process. Furthermore, the Objective Statement is usually general enough to address the needs of all students in the class.

Determine Performance Indicators and Rubric

Q: I started to write my Performance Indicators, but then I realized that my Objective Statement is too broad. Can I modify my Objective Statement?

A: In some cases, it may be necessary to narrow or broaden the Objective Statement when you get to this component. For instance, it may become apparent that the content and/or skills reflected in the Objective Statement do not span the course or that the Objective Statement is so broad that it will be too onerous to track all the discrete skills. However, once your Performance Indicators are written, you should not need to modify your Objective Statement.

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Q: Do I have to write three-to-six Performance Indicators? Can I write two or eight?

A: We recommend that teachers write three to six six Performance Indicators. Because the Performance Indicators need to adequately represent the Objective Statement, we suggest a minimum of three. In a similar vein, because teachers track student progress on all Performance Criteria throughout the course, we suggest a maximum of six. However, in atypical circumstances (e.g., a teacher who only teaches students for a semester), it may be appropriate to write more or fewer.

Q: What if I have students who are significantly below or above grade level proficiency, and therefore are not on the rubric that I use for the rest of class?

A: In these cases, it may be necessary to use more than one learning progression rubric. Essentially, you want learning progression rubric(s) which will allow you to measure and show growth for all students in your class. More guidance on the creation of rubrics is available on the SLO website.

Q: Can I use a rubric my team already created or a district rubric as my Learning Progression Rubric?

A: It is recommended that teachers use existing rubrics as starting points for their Learning Progression Rubric. However, it is important to note differences between a scoring rubric and a learning progression rubric. Since most existing rubrics are often written to score specific tasks, it is likely that teachers will have to modify these in order to articulate the student progression of learning toward the Met Expectations level for the chosen Objective. In addition, teachers can reference the PARCC Performance Level Descriptors to identify student behaviors and/or skill sets that could be included in their Learning Progression Rubrics.

Collect and Analyze Baseline Data to Categorize Students' Preparedness Levels

Q: What should teachers use for Baseline Data?

A: Teachers should draw on any sources of student data that are available at the beginning of the course that will indicate students' preparedness levels as they relate to the Objective Statement, e.g., CMAS scores, DRA results, STAR results, district interim scores. In addition, teachers may also need to collect their own relevant data on their students at the beginning of the course. An early task that addresses prerequisite knowledge and skills for an Objective is usually another helpful way to determine students' preparedness for the work.

Q: Do Teachers need assessments that cover all Performance Indicators when looking at Baseline Data?

A: Teachers should use at least two Baseline Data sources with items and tasks that indicate students' preparedness levels as they relate to the Objective Statement at the beginning of the course. In many cases, the students may not have ever been instructed or assessed in the specific skills and knowledge reflected in the Performance Criteria. Hence, the assessments do not need to cover all Performance Indicators. When determining what types of early assessments/tasks to use for baseline data, ask yourself the following question: "What are the prerequisite skills for this class?" For example, Calculus students are not expected to know Calculus before entering the class, but there are certain mathematical concepts and skills that we know students will need in order to be successful in Calculus.

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Q: I teach kindergarten. Where will I get Baseline Data for my students?

A: You should work with your kindergarten teacher team to determine what data points you can get at the beginning of the school year to use as Baseline Data. If your student attended an ECE program in your school, you should touch base with his/her former teacher to see if there is any data relevant to your Objective Statement s/he may have administered at the end of the previous year. Your team will likely want to select common student work or tasks to utilize as a source of Baseline Data within the first few weeks of school.

Q: Given that ACCESS data is from the prior January, how should it be used?

A: The ACCESS test is given yearly in January. The information gathered through the test is useful in planning for instruction and learning. Kids are continually growing as language learners and you may find that you feel their abilities are higher than their scores. In that case, gather more data to guide your instructional decisions. Looking at the WIDA Speaking and Writing and Listening and Reading Rubrics can be a great resource for these decisions. Keep in mind, that a student's speaking skills may appear advanced when s/he speaks to classmates, but may not be as advanced when s/he is speaking about academic content. Also keep in mind that some language skill development might not correlate with others; for example, a student may be strong in reading English but may struggle when s/he needs to produce English in writing or speaking.

Q: If I use the same class for both of my Objective Statements, shouldn't Baseline Preparedness Levels be the same for both Objectives?

A: Maybe. If both SLOs address the same content, it's highly likely that students' baseline preparedness will be the same. Preparedness should be a broad understanding of how ready a student is for the course. Thus, students in SLOs that address the same content area but through different standards will almost always have the same preparedness. However, if the SLOs address different content areas (for example, one reading SLO and one mathematics SLO), a student's preparedness levels could be significantly different based on their mastery of pre-requisite skills in each content area.

Q: How should interventionists and SPED teachers categorize students' preparedness levels?

A: These teachers might have an unusually large number of students in the "underprepared" category. If this is the case, they may want to further break down the "underprepared" category into subcategories. Teachers should work with their school leader to determine an appropriate designation for these students in the SLO Application.

Q: Should teachers track student performance on all Performance Criteria?

A: Yes, for each Performance Criterion, teachers should track students' progress throughout the course. This will allow teachers to adjust instruction as necessary and assist them in determining students' end of course proficiency levels. It is essential to track student progress on each Performance Criterion to determine students' end of course proficiency levels. It should be noted that it is likely that many tasks and assessments will assess multiple Performance Criteria at the same time.

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Evaluate and reflect on Student Growth

Q: How do I weigh the Body of Evidence to determine students' end of course proficiency levels for each Performance Criterion, so that I can determine whether students met their goals?

A: The Body of Evidence should come from a variety of tasks and assessments. In effect, you need to use your informed professional judgment when weighing the Body of Evidence to determine your students' end of year proficiency levels. You should look for trends exhibited throughout the course, with higher emphasis paid to data points closer to the end of the course, those data points derived from high quality measures, and those data points which show somewhat consistent results. In addition, your team should come to a consensus on the above points so as to strengthen your decisions about how much certain pieces of evidence should weigh.

Q: How should I prepare for my end of year conversation?

A: In order to efficiently and effectively discuss student learning, organize your Body of Evidence or a summary (e.g. data tracker) along with representative samples of student work that demonstrate growth. Along with student growth, be prepared to discuss your measures, alignment of your measures with your Performance Criteria, collaboration with colleagues in design or selection of tasks and scoring, and students' end of course proficiency levels.