



NEBRASKA TEACHER/PRINCIPAL EVALUATION PROJECT

GUIDANCE FOR THE STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVE/SPECIALIST PROGRAM OBJECTIVE COMPONENT

I. Requirements and Rationale

- The Leadership Committee recommended that Student Learning Objectives (SLO) be used in the Nebraska Teacher/Principal Model Evaluation as a way to assess a teacher's impact on student learning in the teacher's primary teaching assignment or subject area. Specialist Program Objectives (SPO) perform a similar function, but they are used to evaluate educational specialists, such as librarians, guidance counselors, and others for whom direct student achievement results may not be an appropriate measure of performance.
- The model Board policy requires that each participating teacher or educational specialist in the pilot schools develop **one** SLO or SPO during the second semester of the 2013-14 school year. In subsequent years, **two** SLO's/SPO's are required for each teacher/educational specialist. Except in the pilot year when they will be developed second semester, Student Learning Objectives/Specialist Program Objectives should be set near the beginning of the school year.
- A Student Learning Objective can be defined as a rigorous, measurable, long-term academic goal for a group of students that teachers use to guide their instructional efforts over a given interval of time. A Specialist Program Objective is similar in that it is a measurable program improvement goal for a specific interval.
- SLO's/SPO's focus on collaboratively developed student achievement or program improvement goals and can be measured by the use a variety of assessments, not just standardized tests. In the process, educators work together to determine content priorities, create student learning or program improvement objectives, set challenging yet achievable targets, and identify appropriate means of assessment.
- Unlike state assessment scores which apply to only about one-third of teachers, SLO's/SPO's can be used to evaluate all educators on the specific content they teach or

support programs they manage. SLO's/SPO's allow for all educators to be held accountable for the academic content or programs for which they are responsible. SLO's/SPO's can be designed for any subject or program in any size of school.

- In addition SLO's/SPO's represent effective instructional practices, including aligning goals with standards, setting achievable objectives, implementing effective instructional strategies, and using high-quality assessments to measure student or program performance. They directly connect teacher/educational specialist practice to student learning or program improvement.

II. Key Features of SLO's/SPO's

- The following are some key features of SLO's and, with some modifications, of SPO's.
 - Clear identification of the student population and instructional content.
 - A specific interval of instruction, often with a pre and post assessment.
 - Rigorous yet realistic targets for student achievement.
 - Defined strategies for achieving growth objectives.
 - Appropriate assessments to measure student results.
- Basic questions for a teacher to consider, include:
 - What are the most important skills and content my students must learn?
 - How will I determine if students have learned them?
 - Based on what I know about my students, what are rigorous yet attainable targets for how much my students should learn?
- SLO's/SPO's can be created for individual teachers/specialists or for teacher/specialist teams. In schools with more than one teacher of the same subject or grade level, it is recommended that at least one team SLO be developed.
- The key to success creating and implementing effective SLO's/SPO's is collaboration between the teacher/educational specialist and his/her principal or supervising administrator. The collaboration should include joint review of baseline data and content needs, collaborative development of objectives and targets, discussion of instructional or program improvement strategies, and agreement on appropriate assessments.

III. Steps in Developing SLO's/SPO's

The steps outlined below are based on developing Student Learning Objectives. Slight modifications will be necessary for developing Specialist Program Objectives. The steps generally follow these Nebraska Model Evaluation Project forms: *Individual Student Learning Objectives Template* or the *Individual Specialist Program Objectives Template*. These forms are included as appendices to this guidance document.

Step 1: Analyze the student population.

- Student Learning Objectives should be based on the actual population of students being taught. This requires gathering information about conditions that may affect learning, such as English language proficiency, learning disabilities, etc. Other factors such as poverty, family conditions, and the like may also have an impact on learning. Teachers will need some time at the beginning of the school year to identify specific student population factors in their classes that may have an impact on learning.
- Curriculum needs also must be assessed through a review of past student performance or through some current baseline assessment. To design SLO's effectively, teachers will need to know about students' current skills, presence or absence of skills that are prerequisite to new learning, and the like. Again, some time is required at the beginning of the year to gather this information.

Step 2: Determine priority content.

- SLO's should clearly focus on what the essential learning is for a course or subject area. Determining priority content is a collaborative process in which teachers and principals analyze the year's curriculum to determine the most critical learning. High-priority content should be aligned to local or state curriculum standards, consist of a significant portion of the content to be taught during the instructional interval, and should include the essential knowledge and skills necessary for each student to succeed at the next grade or course level. A key questions to consider is: **Would students be at a great disadvantage if they exited this course or grade level without this content knowledge?**
- High-priority content must also be specific to the students actually being taught. If students lack the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed to meet grade level objectives, these must be taught before higher level content can be addressed.

- Content priorities should be aligned across grade levels and subjects. Ideally, all teachers of the same grade level or subject within a school would collaborate on the same Student Learning Objectives, although the targets may vary depending on student needs and baseline data. Some districts have used building-level teams to determine priority content.
- For most elementary teachers in pilot schools, Student Learning Objectives will likely focus on reading or math and should be linked to school or district goals in those subject areas.
- For secondary teachers, priority content will vary greatly by subject area. However, SLO's as used in the Nebraska model are assumed to be tied to each teacher's actual teaching assignment. For example, the SLO's for a music teacher should be focused on the music curriculum; for a PE teacher, the PE curriculum, etc. This requires teachers and principals to determine critical content for several subject areas. The resources listed at the end of this document can provide assistance in this process.

Step 3: Gather baseline data.

- Baseline data describes students' current knowledge in relation to overall grade level or course objectives. To the extent feasible, it should be based on the actual student population to be taught and pre-testing may be necessary to gather that information. In some cases, the subject matter to be taught may be so new to students that there may be very little baseline data available. Very little baseline data might be available, for example, for students learning to play a musical instrument for the first time. In that case, some assumptions may need to be made based on the teacher's experiences with prior classes or other sources of information.
- It does not require elaborate testing to assess baseline data. Some information may be available from previous year's testing; other information may be gathered with brief commercial or locally-developed assessments. The key is to determine what knowledge and skills students will need to acquire and compare that to what they already have.
- Baseline data will form the basis for differentiated or tiered targets for the learning objectives. As the data is gathered, group students by skill levels as a preliminary step to determining targets.

Step 4: Develop the learning objective or goal.

- The learning objective or goal needs to state in specific and measurable terms what the teacher wants students to achieve by the end of the instructional interval. Some authors, such as James H. Stronge, recommend using the SMART Goal acronym:
 - **Specific**—the goal is focused by content standards and student’s academic needs.
 - **Measurable**—the goal can be assessed with an appropriate instrument. It is important to determine whether the goal calls for **growth** or **mastery**.
 - **Appropriate**—the goal is clearly related to the role and responsibilities of the teacher and achievement of it is within the teacher’s control.
 - **Realistic**—the goal is rigorous yet attainable.
 - **Time-bound**—the goal is contained in a single instructional interval such as a quarter, semester, or year.
- Developing Student Learning Objectives at the right “grain size” can be difficult. Some researchers call this the “Goldilocks Dilemma”. An SLO can be too broad (hard to measure effectively) or too narrow (may not encompass significant content). Collaboration with other teachers and the principal is a key to getting SLO grain size “just right.”
- Numerous sample learning objectives or goals are available in the resources listed below.

Step 5: Determine student achievement targets.

- Targets define in very specific terms how each student or group of students will be expected to perform with regard to the learning objective at the end of the instructional interval. Targets may be expressed in terms of the amount of expected **growth** for a student or group of students, or as the number of students expected to achieve **mastery** or a skill or content element.
- While it is possible to have a common growth target for all students in a class, most growth targets must be differentiated or tiered because not all students arrive at the classroom with the same level of preparedness for the content. Some may lack basic skills, others may have average skills, and still others may be far ahead of their classmates. A rigorous yet attainable growth target should be set for each group.

- The starting place for determining rigorous yet attainable targets for students is the baseline data gathered in the previous step. Good targets require all students to stretch, yet are not so rigorous that students feel doomed to failure. Intermediate or benchmark targets may be set so the teacher and students can see progress toward the SLO's end-of-interval target.
- Most target statements should focus on growth or growth toward mastery for all students. Targets for students who begin below grade level should be set to reduce the gap between their current performance and grade level performance. Targets for high performers should stretch their capacity. Target statements may include appropriate accommodations for students with special needs.
- **Example of a tiered target statement:** *For the current school year, all of my students will make at least a full year's progress on the DIBELS assessment. Of my 20 students, the 10 who scored at grade level on the pre-assessment, will achieve grade level or above scores in all tested areas; the seven students who require strategic intervention will be at grade level by the end of the year; the three students at "at risk/emerging" will move to the category of "low risk/established" on three of the four areas tested by DIBELS.*
- Numerous examples of differentiated target statements can be found in the resources below.

Step 6: Determine the learning interval(s).

Except for the pilot year (2013-14), the learning interval for most Student Learning Objectives should be one school year. However, sub-objectives or sub-targets may be considered for shorter periods such as a quarter or semester. Benchmarks throughout the year may be identified. For secondary courses of shorter duration, the interval should be the length of the course.

Step 7: Determine instructional strategies.

Instructional strategies should be collaboratively selected and be:

- developmentally appropriate for students;
- appropriate to the subject matter;
- differentiated for students with a variety of learning needs;
- include both whole class strategies and interventions of individual students.

Step 8: Select appropriate assessments.

- Although the selection of assessments is listed as Step 8, it should be considered throughout the process. In order to set a learning objective, target student growth or mastery, and develop learning strategies, assessments must be kept in mind.
- A variety of different types of assessments can be used to measure SLO's. These might include local, state, or national standardized tests, end-of-unit or end-of-course exams, pre/post-assessments, and performance assessments. Effective assessments should be aligned to the content being taught, be generally valid and reliable, and be realistic in terms of the time and effort required to administration.
- Statewide assessments, such as Nebraska's NeSA tests, can be appropriate assessments, but they are not the only assessments to be considered and may in fact be inappropriate in many instances. For example, NeSA assessments are broad and may not measure at the same depth of knowledge as other commercial or locally-developed assessments. In addition, because NeSA tests are conducted in April, NeSA scores may not be available until well after the school year is completed. It may be a better alternative to look for assessments that can serve as a proxy for NeSA.
- Standardized assessments such as NWEA MAPS, which are taken multiple times during the year, may be particularly useful to determine growth.
- There are many types of non-test assessments that can be used. Laura Goe has discussed the Four "P's": Projects, Performances, Products, and Portfolios. To use these, teachers need to develop rubrics to measure performance.
- For many subjects, teacher-created assessments may be necessary to use. Criteria to consider for these include:
 - The assessment measures all of the standards included in the SLO.
 - The assessment includes an adequate number of items or points to measure the content.
 - The assessment includes items or tasks that represent a variety of depth of knowledge levels.
 - The assessment is accompanied by a rubric or scoring guide.

- Assessments must be rigorous and comparable across classrooms. In small districts, comparability may be particularly difficult. ESU-based assessment consortia may be one alternative. Another may be adopting assessments for particular subjects developed by other states or educational organizations.
- Numerous types of assessments are available from other states. For example, the *Colorado Assessment Inventory* (see Resources section) lists available assessments in many content areas.

IV. How does a Specialist Program Objective Compare to an SLO?

Steps include:

- Step 1: Analyze the student/school population served by the program.
- Step 2: Determine the topic/area to be addressed by the SPO.
- Step 3: Derive baseline data.
- Step 4: Describe the Specialist Program Objective.
- Step 5: Set growth/improvement targets.
- Step 6: Determine the performance interval.
- Step 7: Describe the program improvement strategies.
- Step 8: Develop an assessment plan.

V. SLO/SPO Procedures

A. SLO/SPO approval process.

- Some time is necessary at the beginning of the year for teachers/specialists to gather baseline data and complete the other elements of the SLO-development process. It is recommended that approval occur by the end of the first quarter of each school year. For the pilot year, approval should be completed by the end of the first semester.
- SLO's/SPO's approval by the principal or supervising administrator should be part of the collaborative process. More than one meeting may be required to complete this process.

- Approval of SLO's/SPO's should consider three factors:
 - **Importance of content.**
 - **Rigor of objectives/targets.**
 - **Quality of the assessment plans.**

- Some districts have used building-level teams to review SLO's before they go to the Principal for final approval. This option increases teacher collaboration in developing rigorous and comparable SLO's.

- The Rhode Island website cited in the Resource section of this document provides excellent criteria to use in evaluating SLO's/SPO's for approval.

B. **Collaboration/conferences.** Successful development and completion of an SLO/SPO requires close collaboration between the teacher/educational specialist and his/her principal/supervising administrator. Conferences might included:

- Beginning of the year conference to consider student population, learning content, baseline data, the Student Learning Objective/Specialist Program Objective, targets, learning strategies, and formative/summative assessments.

- Mid-year conference to include results of formative assessments and adjustments to instructional strategies.

- End-of-year conference to review assessment data and determine results based on the evaluation rubric.

C. **SLO/SPO evaluation rubrics.**

- Following the pilot year (2013-14), each teacher/educational specialist is to develop **two** SLO/SPO's each year. To analyze these, two separate rubrics have been created. The first rubric is designed to assess each individual SLO/SPO so it will be used twice. The results of these assessments are to be discussed with the teacher/educational specialist, but are NOT recorded on the Summative Evaluation Form. These rubrics consist of three elements at four levels of proficiency:

- **Quality and rigor of the objective/targets.**
 - **Effectiveness in implementing the planned strategies.**
 - **Accomplishment of the SLO/SPO goals.**
- The second rubric provides a combined rating for both of the teacher/educational specialist's SLO/SPO's and it is this rating which is transmitted to the summative evaluation document. This summative rating reflects both the degree to which the objective/targets were met and the degree to which the SLO/SPO reflected a challenging plan that was implemented effectively. The key determination is whether the teacher/specialist made a positive impact on student learning or program improvement. Only the combined rating is reflected on the summative evaluation form.

VI. Resources

These sources provide numerous examples of SLO's/SPO's as well as templates and related resources.

- Center on Great Teachers and Leaders: Student Learning Objectives Resource Library: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/tools-publications/online-tools/student-learning-objectives>
- Center for Assessment SLO Toolkit: <http://www.nciea.org/slo-toolkit/>
- American Institutes of Research, SLO Implementation Scorecard and White Papers: <http://educatortalent.org/default.html>
- Austin, TX: <http://archive.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/compensation/slos.phtml>
- Denver, CO: <http://sgoinfo.dpsk12.org/>
- Rhode Island Department of Education: <http://www.ride.ri.gov/educatorquality/educatorevaluation/SLO.aspx>
- Colorado Department of Education Assessment Inventory: <http://coloradopl.org/assessment/assessments>
- James H. Stronge and Leslie W. Grant, Student Achievement Goal-Setting: Using Data to Improve Teaching and Learning, Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 2009.

VII. Appendices

- Nebraska Model Evaluation Project, *Individual Student Learning Objective Template*.
- Nebraska Model Evaluation Project, *Individual Specialist Program Objective Template*.

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