



Reform Support Network

A Toolkit for Implementing High-Quality Student Learning Objectives *2.0*

A Quality Implementation Toolkit for Student Learning Objectives

- Provide Tools for Developing, Approving and Scoring SLOs
- Foster Selection of Quality Assessments and Targets
- Communicate with Teachers and Principals
- Train District Staff and School Administrators
- Ensure Continuous Improvement

May 2014

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
SLO Context: Definition, Benefits, Challenges and Policy Choices	5
SLO Definition.....	5
SLO Benefits	5
SLO Challenges	5
A Spectrum of SLO Approaches.....	6
Connections with College- and Career-Ready Standards.....	8
Component 1: Providing Tools for Developing, Approving and Scoring SLOs	9
Developing SLOs	10
SLO Templates	10
Approving SLOs.....	11
Approval Rubrics	11
Approval Checklists.....	12
Reviewing SLO Progress.....	12
Scoring SLOs.....	12
Delineating Performance Levels	12
Calculating Performance Levels.....	12
Using Technology to Power the SLO Process	13
Component 2: Fostering the Selection of Quality Assessments and Rigorous Targets	14
Strategies for Promoting Assessment Quality	14
Guidance and Training for Selecting or Developing High-Quality Assessments.....	14
Assessment Banks.....	15
Identifying Pre-Approved Assessments.....	15
Setting Rigorous and Appropriate Targets.....	15
Target Setting with Baseline Data.....	15
Component 3: Communicating with Teachers and Principals	17
Content: Making the Value Proposition, Cataloguing Facts and Organizing Resources.....	17
Making the Value Proposition.....	17
Cataloguing Facts.....	18
Organizing Resources.....	21

The Reform Support Network, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, supports the Race to the Top grantees as they implement reforms in education policy and practice, learn from each other, and build their capacity to sustain these reforms, while sharing these promising practices and lessons learned with other States attempting to implement similarly bold education reform initiatives.

Format: Developing Effective Communications Tools.....	22
Two-Page Summary	22
FAQs	22
Summary PowerPoint Presentation	22
Videos	22
Delivery: Reaching Target Audiences	22
“Meeting in a Box”.....	22
Organizing Resources on the Web	23
Moving Beyond Informing Teachers and Principals Toward Inspiring Them	23
Component 4: Professional Development for SLO Implementation	24
In-Person Training.....	24
Online Training Resources and Modules.....	25
Webinars.....	25
PowerPoint Modules	25
Videos	25
Online Courses.....	25
SLO Examples	25
Component 5: Ensuring Continuous Improvement	26
Assessing System-Wide Quality	26
State Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement.....	26
District Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement	27
Appendix: State Resources, by Topic	28
Introduction	28
Component 1	28
Component 2	29
Component 3	29
Component 4	30
Component 5	30

Introduction

A Toolkit for Implementing High-Quality Student Learning Objectives

The Race to the Top Reform Support Network (RSN) designed this toolkit to help States and school districts implement student learning objectives (SLOs) with the highest degree of quality. These SLOs have the following characteristics:

- SLOs set high yet attainable expectations for students and teachers.
- Success on SLOs correlates with success on other high-quality measures in the teacher evaluation framework.
- SLOs support improved instruction and learning.
- Educators and evaluators perceive SLOs as valuable in strengthening teacher practice and fostering a meaningful professional dialogue about student learning.

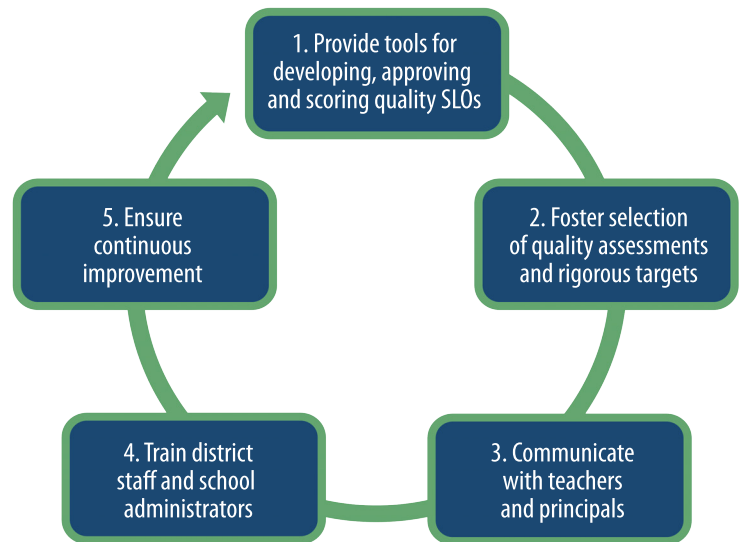
The toolkit has three major objectives:

- Provide information on SLO design and implementation approaches to support States' decisions about how to ensure high-quality, sustainable implementation of SLOs
- Provide easy access to tools and resources that States can learn from and adapt
- Promote interaction and custom viewing of toolkit content based on each users' needs

The toolkit enhances the first RSN Quality Control Toolkit, published in the winter of 2012 and produced by the Student Learning Objective Work Group. As part of their participation in the Race to the Top grant program, leaders from 10 State departments of education joined the work group and developed, among other activities, a framework for quality control that the RSN has revised in collaboration with the now 12 States in the SLO Work Group.

This toolkit is divided into the five components of the framework and highlights activities and tools critical for a quality SLO system. It contains templates, guidance documents and other artifacts from the field that States and school districts can select or adapt. 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.

Figure 1. A Framework for Creating High-Quality SLOs



The RSN is grateful to the innovators in State and local education agencies who produced the materials included in this toolkit. They provide a foundation upon which States can build a quality SLO system that allows teachers of non-tested grades and subjects to participate with rigor in new pay and evaluation systems that require measures of student growth. While the tools herein represent the state of the art, State Education Agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) will produce improved tools over time. In the spirit of continuous improvement, the RSN will update the toolkit as the field gains greater insight and develops even stronger approaches.

SLO Context: Definition, Benefits, Challenges and Policy Choices

SLO Definition

SLOs are content- and grade/course-specific learning objectives that educators can validly measure to document student learning over a defined and significant period of time.¹ They have become the most common method for measuring student learning and growth for teachers of non-tested grades and subjects in evaluation and compensation systems. Some States also require teachers of tested grades and subjects to develop student learning objectives for evaluation purposes. 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, the teacher, principal or district examines baseline data, sets one or more learning goals for the teacher's students and identifies a measure or measures for assessing progress towards them. In most cases, the principal, an evaluator or the district approves the learning goals and the assessments. Teachers later sit down with their evaluators for a mid-term conference to discuss student progress toward the learning goals and to adjust strategies if students are not progressing as expected. At the end of the year, the teachers and evaluator assess student progress, and the evaluator determines how well the teachers succeeded in getting their students to meet the learning goal(s). This determination leads to a score that factors into each teacher's evaluation.

SLO Benefits

This process of setting goals, monitoring progress against those goals and evaluating performance is strong instructional practice. Effective teachers gather data about their students, set goals based on that information and then assess whether the goals have been met. SLOs promote these strong practices across schools and districts, and offer additional benefits:

- **SLOs promote reflective and collaborative teaching practices.** Rich discussions about student learning that occur during and after SLO development can improve instruction. These discussions happen between teachers and their evaluators and among teachers in a grade level or subject area.
- **Teachers perceive SLOs as relevant and empowering as compared with school-wide, value-added measures.** The SLO process allows principals and teachers to influence how teachers are evaluated and design learning objectives for each teacher's course and students.
- **SLOs promote aligned curriculum, assessment and standards.** The SLO process typically requires teachers and principals to identify the standards of focus and to map how assessments will measure progress against those standards. In designing an SLO, teachers must consider how their curricula and instructional strategies will help students meet the standards.
- **SLOs are adaptable to any teacher.** Teachers of all grades and subjects can demonstrate their impact on student learning with SLOs, because SLOs do not rely on standardized assessments.

SLO Challenges

Unlike value-added measures that are standardized and statistically based, teachers write SLOs in most jurisdictions, and they may use different assessments and different growth targets depending on where their students are starting academically. Because of this variability, States and school districts face the challenges of ensuring the quality, rigor and comparability of SLOs across classrooms, districts and entire States.

Yet, States and school districts cannot expect their SLOs to yield the same scientific validity and reliability that value-added measures based on high-quality, standardized State assessments produce. That is simply not possible. Nevertheless, there is strong precedent in other fields for using goal setting in a consistent, credible manner. Employers and employees in many

¹ Marion, S.F., DePascale, C., Domaleski, C., Gong, B., and Diaz-Bilello, E. (2012). [Considerations for Analyzing Educators' Contributions to Student Learning in Non-Tested Subjects and Grades with a Focus on Student Learning Objectives.](#)

Figure 2. SLO-Process Flexibility Spectrum²



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.

The RSN has designed this toolkit to help States and school districts meet this challenge.

A Spectrum of SLO Approaches

As State policy and district innovation create SLO systems across the country, a distinct range of SLO policies and rules have emerged. These policies differ in the degree of standardization or flexibility they grant teachers and evaluators when they create and score SLOs. There is typically a tradeoff between flexibility granted and comparability of SLOs across schools and

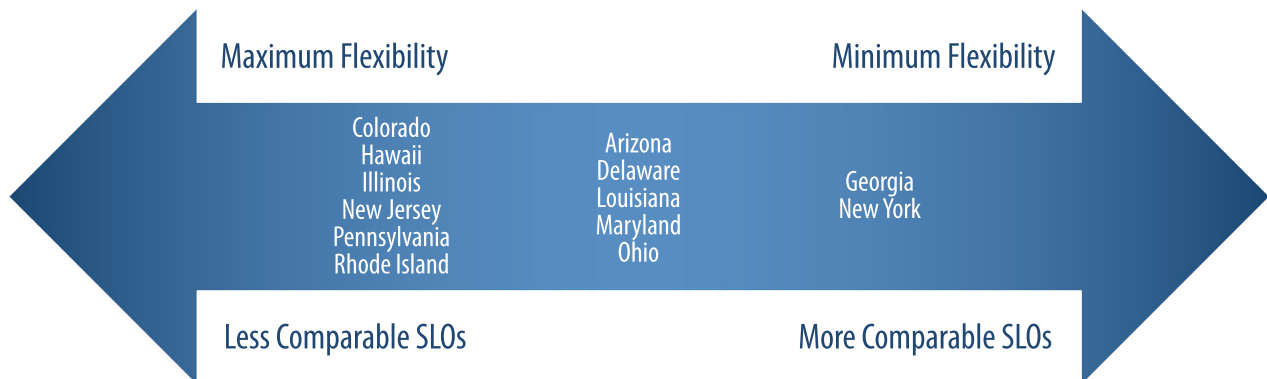
districts. The more flexibility principals and teachers have to set learning targets, select assessments and determine the approval and scoring process, the less comparable the SLOs.

Some jurisdictions (such as Rhode Island, Colorado and New Jersey) prefer SLO systems with more flexibility in target setting, assessment and scoring. These States value goal setting based on discussions about teaching and learning between teachers and evaluators and on the needs of each teacher and student. Their reliance on the judgments of teachers and evaluators results in more target, assessment and scoring variations than systems that require greater standardization. Some jurisdictions that aspire to flexibility launch their SLO work on the standardized side of the spectrum with the intention of granting more flexibility over time, because they do not feel confident in the capacity of their schools to implement SLOs at the outset.

Other jurisdictions (such as Georgia and New York) promote SLO systems that take greater control of target setting, assessments and scoring. Doing so, they believe, results in a greater level of comparability across classrooms. Teachers who have a similar impact on student growth should receive similar

² Analysis of the [American Institutes for Research \(page 13\)](#) and the experience and analysis of Education First informed this graphic.

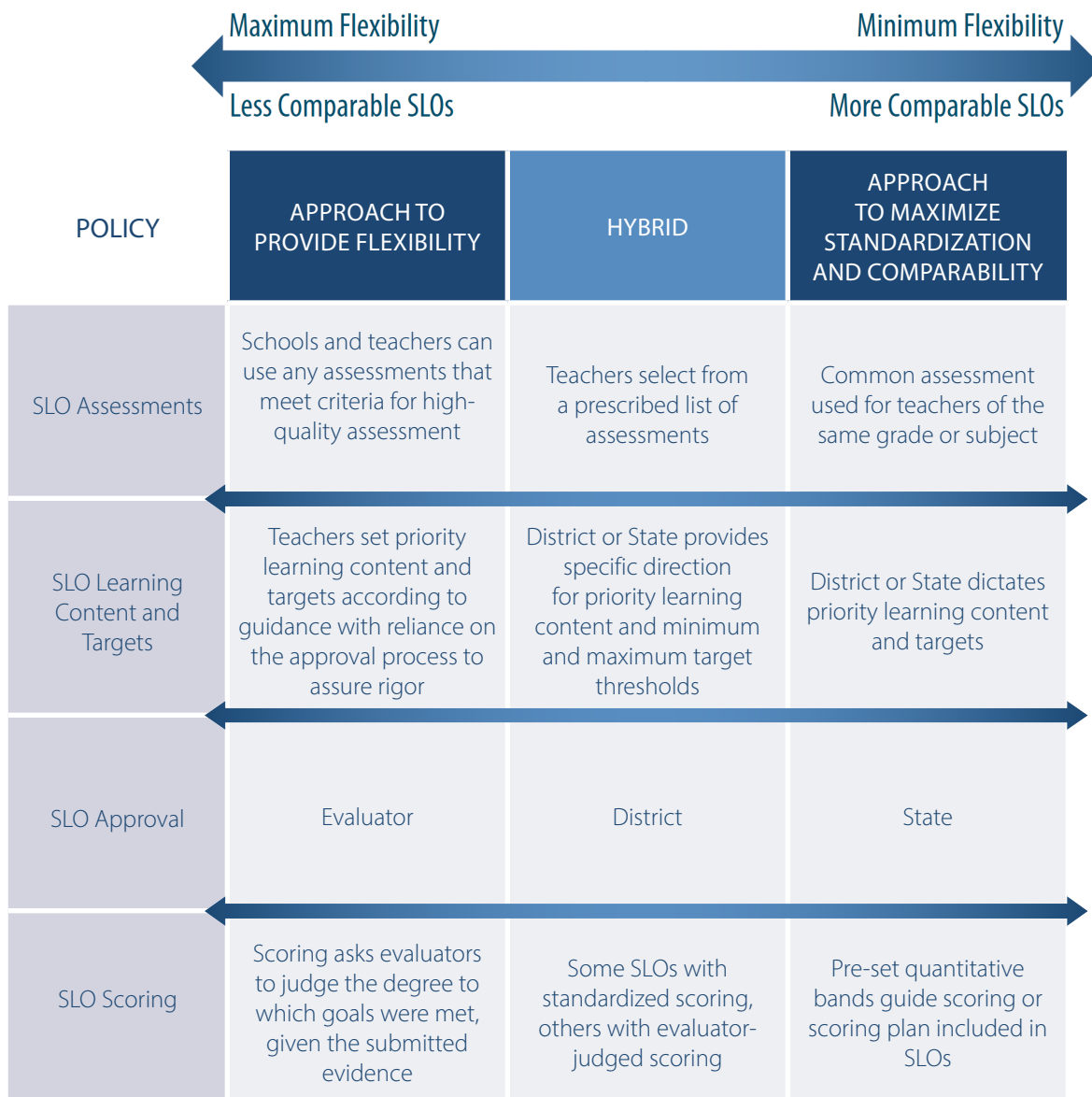
Figure 3. SLO-Process Flexibility Spectrum, by State



growth scores. These States want to promote parity in expectations and credibility between teachers of non-tested grades and subjects and teachers of tested grades and subjects who receive value-added or other standardized growth measures. Some jurisdictions aspire to standardization, but because they lack high-quality common assessments, they launch their SLO work on the flexible side of the spectrum with the intention of standardizing over time.

States should determine what they would like to accomplish through their SLO systems and then decide the amount of flexibility they want to allow in the SLO process to accomplish their goals. If a State's major priority is to have teachers improve their practice and deepen their dialogue with administrators about student learning, it will likely veer more toward SLO policies that grant flexibility. If its foremost priority is to create as valid and reliable a measure as possible

Figure 4. SLO-Process Flexibility Spectrum, by Policy Topic



to compare teacher impact on student learning, then a State will favor policies that promote standardized SLOs. These priorities are ultimately not mutually exclusive. In a more flexible system, with the right training, tools and monitoring, teachers and principals over time will improve the quality of their SLOs and thus the consistency, credibility and comparability of the SLO measure. In a standardized system, States and school districts can build practices into the SLO process that generate student-learning dialog among educators. But States have to choose a starting priority around which to organize their policies. A host of policy choices cascade from this first positioning, some of which are outlined below.

A State's approach to SLO policy has significant implications for the locus and degree of SLO implementation and quality control. States with policies that promote SLO standardization will have a higher implementation lift at the district level, whereas States that promote flexibility will have a higher implementation lift at the school level. The more standardized the SLO process, the less work teachers have to do to draft their SLOs and the less reliant the process is on evaluators to assure quality and rigor. Standardized SLOs require districts to deploy district-wide assessments, prescribe how goals will be set using those assessments and provide clear guidance about what level of performance on the assessment will yield a particular score. In contrast, flexible SLOs demand a significant, sophisticated participation by teachers and their evaluators. This engagement with SLOs can yield substantial benefits, but it also requires time for training, SLO writing and ongoing monitoring for quality.

Connections with College- and Career-Ready Standards

States are implementing new evaluation systems simultaneously with the rollout of college- and career-ready standards and aligned standardized assessments. Both evaluation reform and new standards are seismic changes for the field, and they will be successful only if they meaningfully complement and reinforce

each other. College- and career-ready standards raise expectations for students, and the new evaluation systems promote new teaching practices that help students meet these new expectations. Our challenge is to both communicate this intersection and build it intentionally into our policies and new practices so that educators experience it. An [Aspen Institute report](#) well describes this challenge and the RSN's Transitions Work Group will soon release guidance on how to integrate these reforms further at both the SEA and building levels. An evaluation system with multiple measures (student growth on State tests, classroom observations and student surveys) can accurately predict a teacher's effectiveness.

In the rush to roll out evaluation and standards reform at the same time, one common approach has been to divide and conquer. State and district administrations generally assign different leaders and staffs to the initiatives. Although they intend to work together, in the press of implementation, they may neglect potential intersections between new evaluations and standards. Disconnecting the SLO work from the new standards threatens the quality of SLOs because the SLOs are less likely to align to the new standards and to draw on standards-aligned assessments. Several States, however, are working to overcome their organizational silos and improve the quality of SLOs by connecting their development with the rollout of college- and career-ready standards. For example, [Ohio](#) includes a connection to Common Core State Standards in its SLO quality checklist. Georgia has an assessment item bank in which each item links to a specific standard. Louisiana has a number of annotated exemplar SLOs that explicitly link to the Common Core State Standards. [Colorado](#) has provided for district and school leadership implementation timelines and work plans that include the Colorado Academic Standards (which include the Common Core State Standards), assessment transition, improvement planning and evaluation-implementation benchmarks. The timelines and work plans cover three-month phases and include guiding questions and resources.

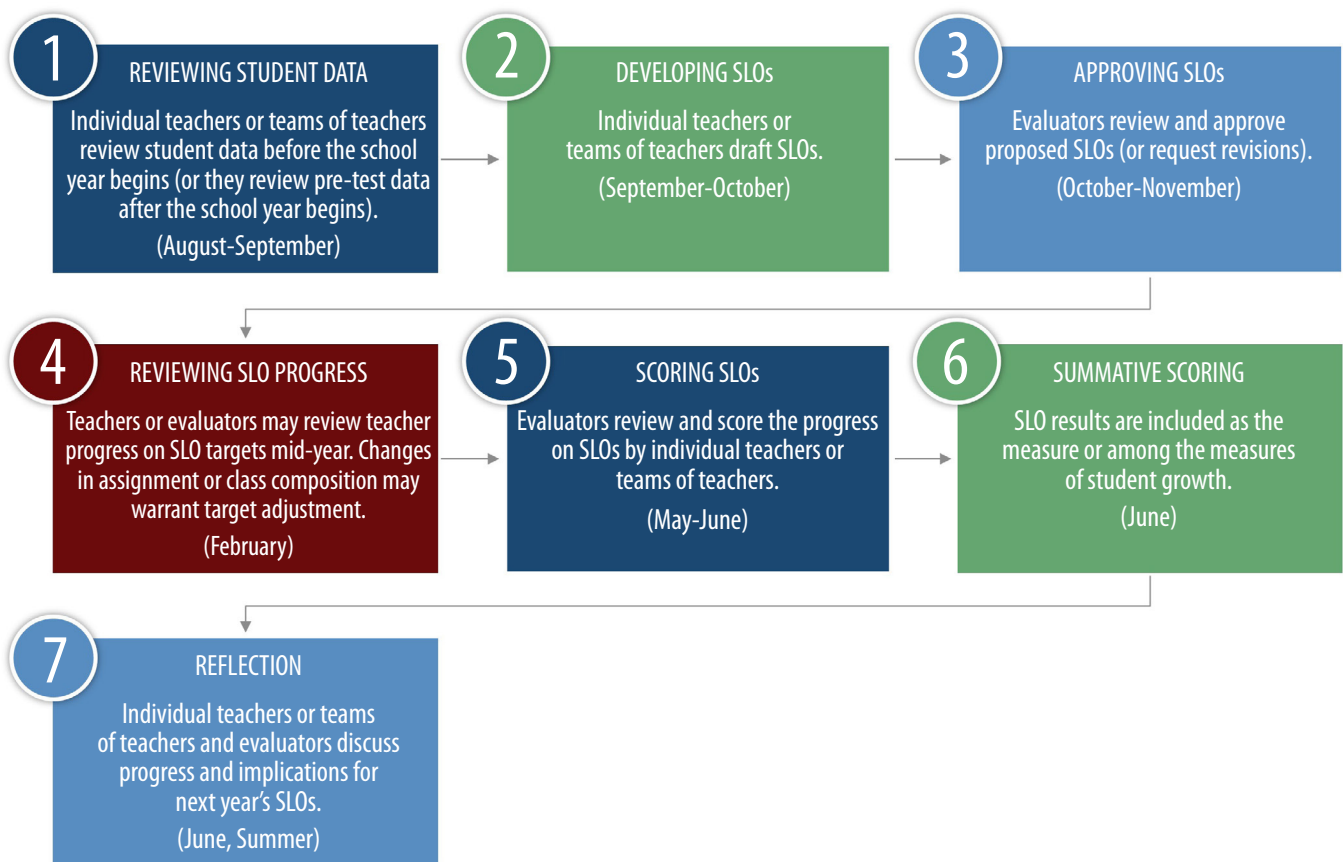
Component 1: Providing Tools for Developing, Approving and Scoring SLOs

The SLO process for teachers is similar in most States and school districts. At the start of the school year, the teacher, principal or district examines baseline data, sets one or more learning goals for the teacher's students and identifies 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). Teachers later sit down with their own evaluator for a mid-term conference to discuss progress students are making toward the learning goal(s) and to adjust strategies if students are not progressing as expected. At the end of the year, the teachers and their evaluators

assess student progress, and the evaluators determine how well the teachers succeeded in achieving their learning goals. This determination leads to a score that factors into the teacher's evaluation. 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 robust tools to support implementation.

This section of the toolkit provides sample approaches to this process of developing, approving and scoring as well as overall guidance to those who implement them.

Figure 5. The SLO Process



Developing SLOs

SLO Templates

Teachers and administrators use SLO templates to create and record their SLOs for a defined interval of instruction. SLO templates, which are forms that prescribe the information that teachers and administrators must provide to create their SLOs, scaffold the development of SLOs. Templates walk the SLO developer step by step through setting objectives, and often call for rigorous reflection and analysis of each element.

State and district templates vary in the content they require. Content common to most State and district templates includes the student population, interval of instruction, learning content, baseline data, assessments and targets. Not all States group this content in the same way. **Rhode Island**, for example, requires a specific “Objective Statement” element that identifies the priority content and expected learning. The **Denver Public Schools** and others have templates that require teachers to list the instructional strategies they will use to meet their SLO target, and many States, such as **Ohio**, require a rationale for the target. Some States incorporate the final SLO scoring mechanics, so teachers and evaluators know from the start what results they will have to produce to receive a specific rating. For example, **New York** requires all teachers and principals to use a State-developed template that includes 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.

State-provided support for developing SLOs does not begin and end with providing templates. Most States provide guidance on what makes an element of high quality. **Rhode Island** has created a two-page brief that lists characteristics of a strong SLO element, and **Louisiana (page 13)** provides similar guidance in its SLO guidance manual. **Pennsylvania** has developed an SLO Help Desk table that presents a description, format clarification and example for each part of its SLO template. States can also structure their templates to promote a comprehensive and high-quality implementation. **Indiana (pages 36–46)** built its 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 many 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.

States can adjust templates in response to teacher feedback, as necessary. **Rhode Island**, for example, recently streamlined its template by removing a section that teachers found confusing, reordered the template’s element order and collapsed several similar elements into one.

Table 1. Common SLO Elements and Guidance for High-Quality Content³

Elements Common To State and District SLO Templates	Common Element Guidance
Student Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes the exact number of students addressed by the SLO • Can describe student population characteristics, including grade, specific abilities, needs and any special population status (some jurisdictions request this information for baseline data) • Teachers can attach student roster with student achievement data as appropriate
Interval of Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objective applies to an instructional period, such as an academic year or semester • Specifies beginning and end dates to clarify when instruction will begin and end for the SLO
Learning Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies the standard(s) the SLO will address • Identifies a subset of the knowledge and essential skills that students are expected to master in a particular course • Describes course curriculum and focus
Baseline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes pre-assessment baseline data and additional data as available, such as historical information about student abilities, learning needs or attendance history • Baseline data can include past performance of similar groups of past students
Assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures the standards set forth in the learning content • Requires students to demonstrate a high level of cognitive processing, including higher-order thinking such as analysis, evaluation and synthesis • Assessments provide meaningful “stretch,” that is, they allow all students, including high- and low-achievers, to demonstrate their knowledge
Targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies either a mastery or growth target • Ambitious yet attainable for the interval of instruction • Identifies the proper scope of an objective, that is, broad enough that it captures the major content and narrow enough that it can be measured • The target may be tiered so as to be both rigorous and attainable for all students included in the SLO

Approving SLOs

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 determine if it meets approval standards. Approval typically occurs at the school level, but can also occur at the district or State level. High-quality rubrics and checklists are most important for those States that emphasize flexibility in their SLO systems so that principals and other evaluators have a well-calibrated tool that facilitates consistent and rigorous SLO approval.

Approval Rubrics

Approval rubrics classify the quality of SLOs in three to four performance levels (for example, “unsatisfactory,” “needs improvement,” “acceptable,” “excellent”) that evaluators use to rate SLOs 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

³ [Targeting Growth Using Student Learning Objectives as a Measure of Educator Effectiveness](#) and [Student Learning Objectives Indicators of a Strong SLO](#)

areas: rationale, population, interval of instruction, assessment, expected gain, learning content and strategies. Some practitioners consider extensive rubrics like Denver's to be teaching tools for those learning how to write and score SLOs. The learners reflect on their ratings across all the elements and draw conclusions about how they can write better SLOs in the future.

Approval Checklists

As more jurisdictions are implementing SLOs, gaining experience and learning from their peers, they have streamlined tools designed to evaluate SLO quality. For instance, **Rhode Island** simply asks teachers and administrators to consider whether an SLO is acceptable or unacceptable in three different areas. The State developed a quality review tool to help educators calibrate their understanding of SLO quality, which is aligned to a do-it-yourself SLO audit released in the fall of 2013. The development of more simplified tools for SLO approval is in fact a trend, with **Indiana**, **Ohio** and **Louisiana (page 13)** using tools that function not as rubrics but as short checklists aligned to criteria for high-quality SLOs. The **RSN** itself, through the leadership of Georgia, Maryland, New York and Rhode Island, has developed a draft approval checklist tool.

Reviewing SLO Progress

Many States suggest that teachers and evaluators conduct a midcourse check-in to monitor how students are progressing toward SLO targets. These conversations focus teachers and evaluators on student learning and the instructional practices that will ensure students meet their goals. This high-quality professional development practice demonstrates to teachers and administrators alike the power of SLOs to improve instruction. **Indiana** and **Arizona (page 39)** provide practitioners with midcourse check-in templates to guide this discussion and promote actionable feedback. Some jurisdictions permit evaluators to adjust SLO targets at the midcourse check-in if the teacher's students or assignment have changed substantially.

Scoring SLOs

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.

Delineating Performance Levels

Almost all districts and States differentiate teacher performance on SLOs by establishing four or five performance levels, which generally correspond to substantially missing the target, nearly hitting the target, hitting the target or exceeding the target. **Rhode Island (page 19)** uses the terms “minimal,” “partial,” “full” or “exceptional” attainment. Other jurisdictions, such as **New York (page 16)**, describe success in aligning with its evaluation framework's effectiveness levels (“highly effective,” “effective,” “developing” or “ineffective”—a sequence otherwise known as “HEDI”). The SLO performance levels correlate to a numeric score that is included in the teacher's summative evaluation rating.

Calculating Performance Levels

States and school districts must decide how much evaluator judgment plays a role in determining the performance level an SLO earns. Evaluator discretion in scoring results is less reliable scoring but may foster more teacher and evaluator dialogue and allow them to take into account on-the-ground realities. On the other hand, a more standardized approach to scoring that allows for less evaluator discretion can maximize the predictability of the SLO score. Three different approaches to performance-level calculation showcase a State's range of options.

Standardized Approach

Some States standardize their SLO scoring process by indicating which student performance outcomes will yield which SLO score. **Ohio**, for example, recommends that districts use an SLO scoring template to input student baseline scores, individual growth targets and post-test scores to calculate the percentage of

students that meet or exceed their growth target. Teachers and evaluators then reference a scoring matrix that reveals the SLO rating associated with one of five possible percent ranges.

Similarly, **Indiana (pages 26–28)** 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 (page 19)** 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 (pages 16–17)** and **Georgia**.

Flexible Approach

Others take a more flexible approach that allows evaluators to examine the performance of teachers against their objectives more holistically. **Rhode Island (pages 19-21)** and **Maryland** allow 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 informed by a scoring process map.

Hybrid Approach

Some States take aspects of both approaches. While **Indiana (pages 26–28)** requires strict reliance on numeric measures for whole-class objectives, it has less strict requirements for SLOs written for targeted populations. In fact, for target-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. While all teachers and principals must translate their scores into HEDI levels, SLOs in courses that use a State

assessment must have an objective based on State averages for similar students, and the HEDI levels are predetermined. For other teachers and principals, New York gives the district flexibility to determine how to score SLOs and align them to the HEDI scale, though the State requires educators with multiple SLOs to weight the results of the SLOs proportionately based on the numbers of students in each SLO.

Using Technology to Power the SLO Process

Many jurisdictions are investing in technology platforms to capture valuable data and support educators as they complete each step in the SLO process. Rhode Island has implemented a statewide system to support the entire evaluation process, from professional growth plans and observations to approving and scoring SLOs, including capturing teachers’ final evaluation ratings. Ohio has implemented a similar statewide system for capturing SLO ratings, and Pennsylvania has a platform that allows teachers to record SLOs in an online template that they can share with principals to gain electronic feedback. Washington, DC Public Schools (DCPS) and Denver Public Schools have developed more comprehensive Web-based systems for managing and tracking SLOs. These systems streamline the SLO process by allowing educators to complete the entire SLO process online, including submitting, approving and scoring SLOs at the appropriate time during the school year. DCPS even pre-populates a target for each teacher based on his or her grade, subject and the district-wide guidance on target setting. Teachers can refine and customize the targets if they choose, but the system always provides an appropriate default target that teachers can use as a starting point. These systems support quality control by promoting good practice, making the SLO process manageable and supplying data for monitoring and continuous improvement.

Component 2: Fostering the Selection of Quality Assessments and Targets

Assessment selection and target setting are the crux of the SLO process. Assessments are the primary source of data educators use to gauge student performance. Poorly designed assessments do not accurately measure student abilities. Therefore, if SLOs are based on low-quality assessments, the SLO process cannot yield accurate or meaningful results. But even when assessments are of high quality, if teachers set easily attainable or overly ambitious targets for student performance on assessments, the SLOs will not be a credible measure of teacher impact on student growth.

Strategies for Promoting Assessment Quality

An assessment can be any measure that allows students to effectively demonstrate what they know and can do, such as a performance task, portfolio or standardized test. States and school districts must subject assessments used for SLOs to a rigorous quality-assurance process, while considering time (to create, administer and score), cost, available expertise, resources and quality. Those who use assessments therefore need guidance, as they either procure existing assessments or develop new assessments to support SLO implementation.

Some States allow flexibility in assessment selection for SLOs, while other States are more prescriptive. States with more flexibility give educators great latitude to choose or create an assessment for their SLOs. These States provide guidance and training for districts and teachers on the selection of high-quality assessments, and some States provide assessment banks of pre-screened assessments from which educators can draw. On the other end of the spectrum, States and districts with more standardization either mandate specific assessments for the various non-tested grades and subjects or they determine a list of pre-approved assessments from which teachers and districts must choose.

Guidance and Training for Selecting or Developing High-Quality Assessments

State guidance for assessment development commonly asks implementers of SLOs to examine the quality of assessments chosen to measure student learning, the assessments' alignment to district or State standards and the procedures used in administering them. **Rhode Island** provides a worksheet that teachers or LEAs can complete to justify the use of an existing or teacher-created assessment. **Georgia** (pages 39, 51–57) requires its districts to apply a table of specifications and a measure-criteria table to assessments they create for SLOs (districts use the same devices to select pre-existing measures). **Ohio** provides detailed guidance on selecting a high-quality assessment, including examples for a variety of grades and subjects and a summary check list. **Colorado** provides a comprehensive tool for reviewing, editing and revising locally created assessments designed to help educators rate an assessment's potential for measuring student academic growth aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards.

Providing guidance on assessment selection and development is important and helpful but not entirely sufficient. Educators need the knowledge and skills to choose and create assessments, which typically requires States and districts to help teachers develop these skills. Many States have invested in assessment literacy training and support for districts. In Georgia's first year of SLO implementation, the State provided four days of assessment development training for teachers and content specialists in various regions of the State. The trainings focused on items, rather than complete assessments, in order to create a sense of ownership of assessment design. Rhode Island offers two interactive modules on its Website: **Assessment Literacy** and **Using Baseline Data to Set Targets**. Rhode Island also recently launched an **Assessment Toolkit** with four distinct tools for developing and selecting quality assessments, using baseline data,

reviewing assessments and collaborative scoring. Ohio has developed a three-step training process, which includes delivery of 100 one-day trainings for district and building teams, a series of six online modules that will be available through the SEA's Website and six assessment-literacy specialists to help expand professional development (PD) at the district level.

Assessment Banks

Many districts struggle with similar gaps in assessment coverage for a large number of grades and subjects. Some States are therefore coordinating the development of statewide assessment banks to address the gaps. Colorado organized and supported statewide collaboratives of teachers of common subjects, and asked them to identify and create high-quality assessments that are fair, valid and reliable measures of student learning. The State catalogs the assessments in a resource bank and makes them available to all districts. The Colorado Department of Education Resource Bank includes assessments for all grades and content areas. They provide districts with assessment options or starting points from which they can build their own assessments for student learning. Districts may also use the assessments to measure teacher effectiveness. Georgia also coordinated the development of assessments by inviting teams of educators across the State to work together. Throughout the assessment development process, SEA staff trained and supported the teams. As in Colorado, Georgia permits districts to use the vetted public domain measures, customize them or use their own locally developed or procured measures.

Identifying Pre-Approved Assessments

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 also provides a list of pre-approved, third-party assessments. The State requires districts that wish to use a third-party assessment to choose one

from the list for applicable teachers or principals. New York further 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.

Setting Rigorous and Appropriate Targets

Target Setting with Baseline Data

Setting the right targets or objectives is one of the most challenging parts of the SLO process. Targets should identify the expected learning or mastery outcome for the defined instructional period. Some States and school districts provide specific guidance on how to set targets, some tell teachers what their target should be and others allow greater latitude. The challenge in setting targets is that teachers and administrators must give careful thought to whether they have set an objective that is rigorous—yet realistic.

Targets are intended to convey growth and are typically framed as a percentage of students meeting a certain score or pass rate on an assessment (mastery target) or as a percentage of students demonstrating a certain amount of growth on an assessment (growth target). For example, **Ohio (pages 9–10)** gives the following exemplar growth target in its guidebook: "100% of my students will progress at least one level on the FitnessGram during the fall semester." **New Jersey (pages 12–14)** offers this example of a mastery target: "At least 70% of my students will attain a score of 80% on the end of course assessment." Vertically aligned courses, such as mathematics courses through algebra, typically demand growth targets while single-experience courses, such as geometry, lend themselves more to mastery targets.

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.”⁴ In other words, a growth target should not be simply a post-test score minus a pre-test score, unless the pre- and post-tests are vertically aligned. Educators should set targets for a summative assessment based on the review of students’ baseline data or information about students’ prior knowledge and skills at the start of the instructional period.

The Center for Assessment offers guidance on using multiple sources of baseline data to help set targets, some of which is summarized in its [SLO Toolkit](#). To assess the baseline, educators can examine data from State assessments, previous core content classes, student work samples or some combination of the three. Educators can also conduct their own student survey or classroom-based assessment to identify students’ starting knowledge. “Once the data have been collected, teachers should examine and interpret the available data in order to form a comprehensive picture of the students in the class. When multiple data sources are used and show similar areas of student strengths and weaknesses, teachers can be more confident in the starting points and the targets established.”⁵

⁴ Marion, S.F., DePascale, C., Domaleski, C., Gong, B., and Diaz-Bilello, E. (2012). [Considerations for Analyzing Educators’ Contributions to Student Learning in Non-Tested Subjects and Grades with a Focus on Student Learning Objectives](#).

⁵ Center for Assessment. (2013). [Using Baseline Data and Information to Set SLO Targets: A part of the SLO Toolkit](#).

States increasingly recommend that SLO developers set differentiated learning targets based on their students’ starting points instead of setting a uniform target for all students. [Indiana \(page 22\)](#) asks educators to establish targets that are tiered or differentiated based on different groupings of students’ starting points. The process includes setting a “mastery” target for a subject (for example, 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 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, an excerpt of the guidance from [Indiana \(page 19\)](#) reads, “To be considered **Highly Effective**, all students in the high and medium levels of preparedness and most of the students in the low level achieve content mastery.” [Rhode Island \(page 11\)](#) and [Arizona \(page 26-36\)](#) also recommends tiered targets when student knowledge of a course’s subject matter varies across students.

Component 3: Communicating with Teachers and Principals

Ensuring that teachers and principals understand SLOs can be as challenging as executing the SLO process. Just as SLO procedures composed of checklists and calculations require time and focus, conveying the rationale behind high-quality SLOs and describing their nuts and bolts requires ongoing, thoughtful communication between States and educators. States that communicate well make clear value propositions for different audiences, support their claims with facts and resources, and use accessible, varied formats to deliver these messages.

This component of the toolkit aims to help States reflect on the quality of their communications content, format and delivery to increase educator understanding of SLO purpose and process. It does not contain an exhaustive inventory of communications strategies, but rather an organized compilation of best practices.

- The first section shows how States can create compelling content by creating an inventory of their value propositions, facts and resources.
- The second section offers examples of how States are using a variety of formats to connect with educators.
- The third and final section describes two delivery mechanisms through which States can disseminate their communications pieces.

The RSN has developed a series of tools that correspond to each of these three sections and has compiled these tools in a **Communications Workbook**. States can use this workbook to adapt the best practices described below for their own use. The workbook contains five tools:

1. [Making the Value Proposition Worksheet](#)
2. [Cataloging Facts Worksheet](#)
3. [Organizing Resources Worksheet](#)
4. [Two-Page Summary Template](#)
5. [FAQs Example](#)

Content: Making the Value Proposition, Cataloging Facts and Organizing Resources

States can deliver clear, targeted messages when they have internally clarified value propositions for different audiences and can draw upon a complete and structured inventory of facts and resources. The following section showcases effective ways States are presenting this information.

Making the Value Proposition

A first step in creating or refining a communications strategy is crafting clear messages to help educators understand the rationale for SLOs. No matter which audience they are targeting, States communications pieces describe the impact that SLOs can have on student learning. For example, [New Jersey \(page 4\)](#) describes how SLOs indicate when and how to adjust instruction to meet student needs. The State also highlights that SLOs help teachers and evaluators understand student academic strengths and weaknesses. States can also connect with different stakeholders by offering tailored value propositions, usually by listing the ways SLOs advance teacher and principal practice and promote learning across school districts. For example, [Arizona \(page 2\)](#) targets teachers when it emphasizes that SLOs provide an opportunity for teachers to take ownership of a portion of their evaluation, and [Ohio \(page 6\)](#) targets principals in describing how SLOs focus instruction on specific school goals and promote collaboration among teachers across classrooms and grade levels.

States can also help teachers and principals understand the rationale behind SLOs by describing how SLOs are different than previous processes for measuring student growth, especially for teachers of non-tested grades and subjects. Presenting contrasts in table form can drive home the differences or show

that SLOs are a logical continuation of what educators already consider best instructional practice. New Jersey adopts this practice to communicate about its state evaluation framework (Figure 6).

States can use the first **Communications Workbook** tool, “**Making the Value Proposition Worksheet**” to record and articulate these value propositions for appropriate audiences.

Cataloguing Facts

States can supplement value propositions that explain the *why* behind SLOs by explaining *how* teachers and administrators can implement them. Best practice includes clearly defining *what* an SLO is, *who* SLOs affect, and *when* key changes take place. Unlike value propositions, which States often tailor to a particular audience, States can avoid confusion and ensure consistency by writing facts down once and reusing them as needed. States can use the second **Communications Workbook** tool, “**Cataloguing Facts Worksheet**” to identify key facts about the State SLO process so that they can communicate them to stakeholders. The following subsections show potential ways of communicating these basic facts.

Explaining What an SLO Is

All States communicate the details of their SLO frameworks, although in different ways. The following compilation of SLO facts combines content common to many State communications pieces and offers one potential sequence for explaining SLO basics.

1. Provide a definition

States do not all define SLOs in the same way, but many States use similar language that describe SLOs as goals or targets that are specific and measurable, based on available prior student learning data, aligned with standards, and based on student progress and achievement. Since SLO frameworks tend to include nuanced language that varies by State, States can avoid confusion by stating what they mean by an “SLO” up front. For example, **New York (page 6)** defines SLOs as “academic goals for groups of students that are aligned to State standards and can be tracked using objective measures.” **Ohio (page 5)** describes an SLO as a “measure of a teacher’s impact on student learning within a given interval of instruction. An SLO is a measurable, long-term academic

Figure 6. New Jersey’s State Evaluation Framework

State Evaluation Framework	
NOW*	PROPOSED
Perfunctory	In-depth
Measured by observation only	Multiple measures
One observer	Multiple observers
No connection to student growth	Student growth counts
Training not required	Comprehensive training required
Disconnected from professional development	Will provide for more targeted professional development
Minimal educator involvement	Educator-driven

*This is reflective of current minimum requirements by state, and may not reflect practice in all districts.

goal informed by available data that a teacher or teacher team sets at the beginning of the year for all students or for subgroups of students.” [Austin \(page 2\)](#) uses yet another definition: “SLOs are targets of individual student growth that teachers set at the start of the course and strive to achieve by the end. These targets are in specific areas within State or national standards that have been identified as a high need based on a thorough review of available data.”

2. Describe the SLO process

Several States, including [Arizona \(page 12\)](#), [New Jersey \(page 10\)](#) and [Ohio \(page 8\)](#), use visuals to help teachers understand the SLO process. Breaking

down the SLO process into discrete steps as Ohio has done in Figure 7 can help educators understand that the process is organized and manageable.

3. Explain complex elements

Most States explain the most challenging elements of SLOs. Teachers and administrators commonly have the most difficult time understanding how to develop learning content, set growth or achievement targets and identify appropriate assessments. Visuals like those from [Indiana \(pages 8–9\)](#) and [Arizona \(pages 26 and 32\)](#) can help educators understand these more nuanced elements (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Ohio SLO Process

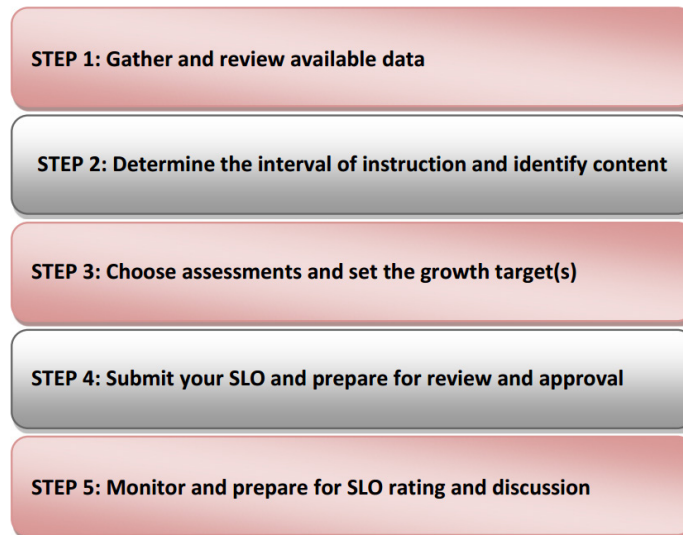
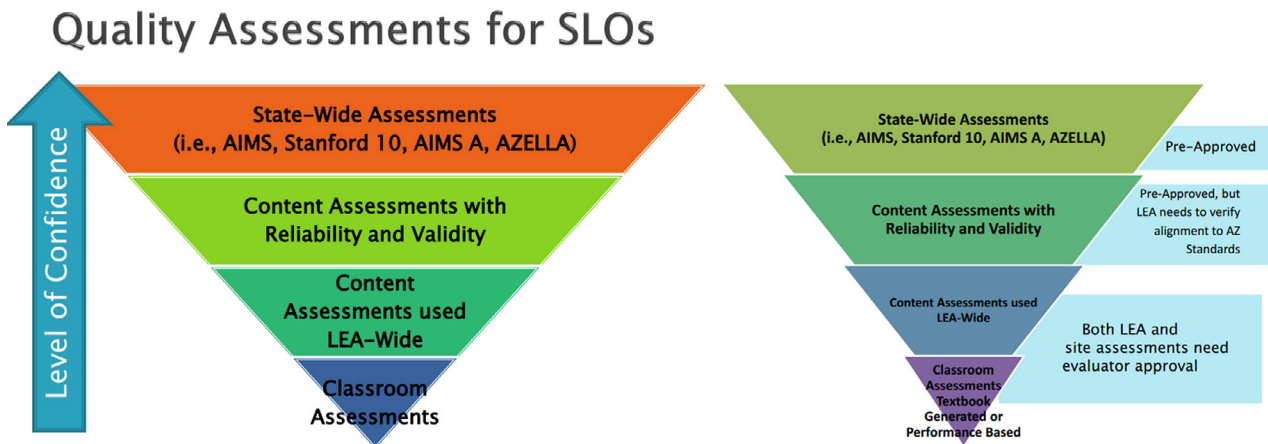


Figure 8. Arizona Assessments



4. Demonstrate how SLOs fit into the State’s educator evaluation system

States can help audiences understand the important part SLOs play in a broad strategy to improve student achievement and educator quality by visually connecting SLOs to the State’s educator evaluation system. [Ohio \(page 4\)](#), [Maryland \(page 3\)](#) and [New Jersey](#) use visuals to help explain the role that SLOs and other measures of teacher effectiveness play in an educator’s overall performance evaluation (Figure 9). Coupling these visuals with information about professional development and support, rather than presenting

them in isolation, can help reinforce for teachers that SLOs are about improving student learning, not just securing a growth measure.

Explaining Who SLOs Affect and How

States can clear up confusion among teachers and administrators by indicating to which teachers SLOs apply and how the new system will impact them. Figure 10 showcases how [Indiana \(page 4\)](#) classifies its teachers into three groups, provides an example of the types of teachers who fall within each and then uses pie graphs to illustrate the SLO contribution to their overall evaluation rating.

Figure 9. The Role of SLOs in New Jersey’s Educator Evaluation System

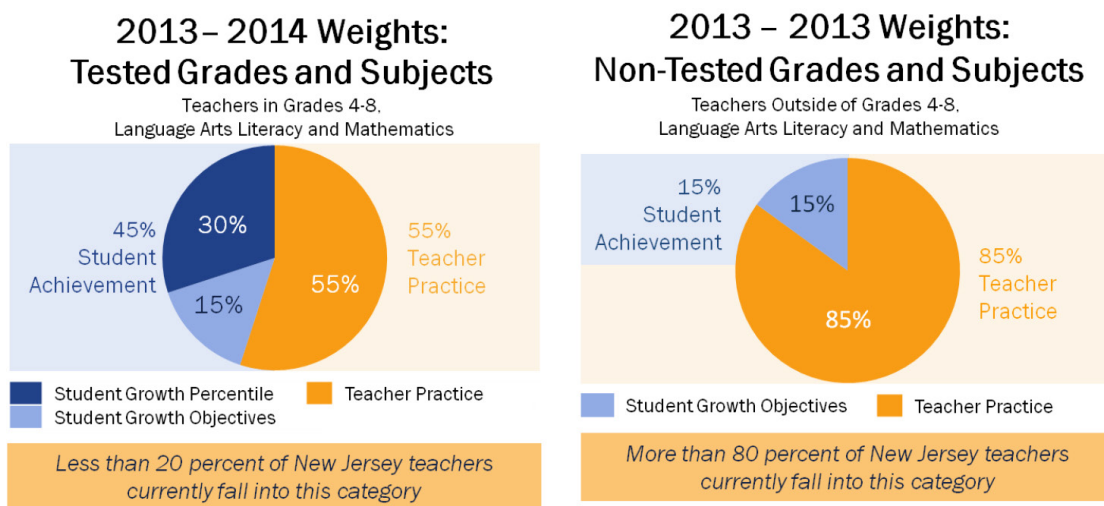
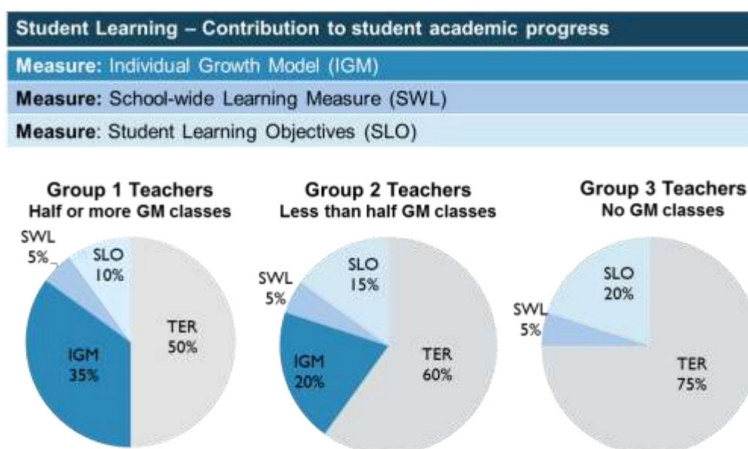


Figure 10. How SLOs Affect Indiana Teachers



Explaining the Timeline for Changes, Teacher Response

States can also assuage educators' concerns by making clear when teachers need to complete certain parts of the SLO process. Some States, including [Indiana \(page 6\)](#), offer visuals that chart milestones for implementing educator evaluation systems and their supports (Figure 11).

States can also help educators understand how SLOs fit into the big picture by developing similar, SLO-specific timelines that include, for example, when SLOs

may count in personnel decisions. As shown in Figure 12, [Austin \(page 6\)](#) provides educators with a detailed timeline so that educators can integrate the SLO process into their calendars.

Organizing Resources

Most States implementing SLOs have produced a collection of in-depth guidance documents and helpful templates, forms and other process tools to help educators understand and use SLOs in their work. By pointing audiences to a central, well-organized pool of resources, often a Website, States

Figure 11. Timeline for Indiana's RISE Design and Implementation



Figure 12. Austin School District Timeline

SLO TIMELINE 2013–2014

The following is a suggested timeline for year-long SLOs. Deadlines are labeled and highlighted. When different, dates and deadlines for semester SLOs can be found in the informational box at the bottom of the page. Details regarding each component can be found by clicking on the links, or choosing the corresponding section in the [TOC](#).

AUG – SEPT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete Needs Assessment
AUG – SEPT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine Team or Individual and student group
SEPT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Align to standards and create Learning Objective
SEPT – OCT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop/choose Assessment and get approval
SEPT – OCT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Administer, Analyze and document Pre-Assessment Results
SEPT – OCT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Create Growth Target
OCTOBER 25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deadline: Complete and submit both SLOs for approval in online Database
SEPT – APR	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monitor student progress toward Learning Objective
NOV – JAN	<input type="checkbox"/>	Complete Revision Requests from principal and/or REACH team
JANUARY 20	<input type="checkbox"/>	Key Date: New Student Enrollment cut-off
JAN 6 – FEB 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Request your own Revision (class or student changes)
FEB 14	<input type="checkbox"/>	All pre-assessments must be given
MAR 31- MAY 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	Administer Post-Assessments (semester deadlines below)
MAY 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deadline: Complete Final Submission Form

can ensure that intended audiences can access these resources. For example, [Louisiana](#) provides four lists of hyperlinked resources that correspond to four questions: “What should students know?,” “How will I measure success?,” “What are they able to do now?” and “How will I monitor progress?” States can use the third [Communications Workbook](#) tool, “[Organizing Resources Worksheet](#)” to gather and group resources.

Format: Developing Effective Communications Tools

States can help educators understand the purpose and process complexities of SLOs by packaging their messages in a variety of formats. The [Communications Workbook](#) provides templates to create popular formats: a two-page summary, talking points and FAQs. States can use the content they develop in the first three [Communications Workbook](#) tools to populate these templates and make the examples their own.

Two-Page Summary

Many States have created helpful and detailed guidance manuals, but fewer have produced shorter, more digestible pieces that provide teachers with essential information at-a-glance. [New Jersey](#) and [Indiana](#) have synthesized information in their guidebooks into two-page briefs with succinct sections on essential topics. [New Jersey](#) has also produced a quick-start guide that explains five basic steps in the SLO process. Each tool provides links to the States’ full guidebooks where educators can find more detailed information. States can use the fourth [Communications Workbook](#) tool, the “[Two-Page Summary Template](#)” to adapt content they developed in the first three tools to create a custom brief. The template contains four basic sections: key takeaways, a value proposition, SLO facts and additional resources.

FAQs

States can create FAQs as a powerful, easy-to-develop way to address misinformation about SLOs. FAQs often communicate information from a teacher’s point of view, which indicates to educators that SEAs are listening and addressing their SLO concerns. States can also easily expand them as educators raise additional questions over time. Grouping questions by category

can help audiences quickly locate answers to their questions. For example, Ohio’s SLO Web page groups by topic nearly 40 frequently asked questions about SLOs, which include facts about implementation as well as each element of [Ohio’s](#) SLO template. Similarly, [New Jersey](#) and [Rhode Island’s](#) Web pages group questions by topic. Other helpful FAQ lists include those found in [Austin](#) and [Indiana’s](#) (page 12–14) SLO guidance manuals. States can browse the [Communications Workbook’s](#) “[FAQs Example](#)” for questions that they can use in or adapt for their own FAQ documents.

Summary PowerPoint Presentation

Several States, including [Arizona](#), [New Jersey](#) and [New York](#) have developed PowerPoint presentations that provide overviews of their SLO frameworks. States can use these slides to communicate greater detail than possible in a two-page summary and in a more engaging format than a guidance manual. States can use the content they develop in the first three [Communications Workbook](#) tools to create or revise existing slides that district leaders, principals and teachers can deliver as part of a “meeting in a box.”

Videos

[Rhode Island](#) has produced a short video that features educators reflecting on their experiences implementing SLOs in their classrooms and schools. In their own words, they describe challenges, reflect on lessons learned and articulate what they see as the benefits of the SLO process.

Delivery: Reaching Target Audiences

“Meeting in a Box”

Research by [The Winston Group](#) and others confirms that principals are by far the most credible messenger to teachers about educator evaluation issues, far more so than central offices or a State agency. Rhode Island and Indiana have developed “meetings in a box” that contain tools and resources to support principals and teacher ambassadors who understand SLOs and can communicate about them clearly and positively. States can combine the two-page summary, talking

points and FAQs developed in the [Communications Workbook](#) with a PowerPoint presentation to create a ready-made package of materials organized together in a virtual “box,” which can be a list of links on a Web page, a single PDF document or a “.zip” file that contains each piece. Rhode Island has found that providing principals and teacher leaders with training on how to use the “meeting in a box” materials is a best practice.

Organizing Resources on the Web

Streamlining, grouping by type and providing dates for all resources are Website basics. Many States and districts, such as [Austin](#), [Denver](#), [Georgia](#), [New Jersey](#), [New York](#) and [Ohio](#), organize SLO resources on a single Web page, which signals to educators that they can retrieve the most recent information and tools within a few minutes. Often the most accessible Web pages group SLO resources into categories that reflect how users search for information. For example, [New Jersey](#) groups information into categories such as “How-to Documents” and “Resources and Presentations” so users can easily find what they are looking for.

States can prevent the spread of misinformation online by indicating when resources are posted. For example, Rhode Island’s [Educator Evaluation home page](#) has a prominent “Announcements” section that lists the most recent posts to the site so that audiences can stay up to date without having to browse through multiple Web pages. The State also marks updated documents with the word “**NEW!!**” in bold, red letters so that educators always have easy access to the latest information.

States can also use their Websites to make large amounts of information more digestible. For example, many States communicate valuable information about SLOs via comprehensive guidance manuals. However, such formats can be overwhelming and make it

difficult for practitioners to quickly find the information they need. [Maryland](#) has made its 207-page Teacher and Principal Evaluation Guidebook easier to comprehend by breaking it into chapter-sized PDF chunks that its audiences can browse in outline form for context and then view or print a particular section.

Moving Beyond Informing Teachers and Principals Toward Inspiring Them

The RSN strives with this toolkit section and its companion workbook to help States keep educators well-informed about the purpose of and processes associated with SLOs. However, engaging educators goes beyond keeping them informed. The RSN encourages States as they implement SLOs to move their communications away from simply informing audiences and toward inspiring them to act by inviting feedback, input and discussion. The RSN has developed a communications framework, the “**4I’s** Framework,” to help States meet this challenge. See “Component 5: Ensuring Continuous Improvement” in this toolkit for strategies States are using to listen to educators implementing SLOs in the field.

Figure 13. RSN “4I’s” Framework



Component 4: Professional Development for SLO Implementation

SLOs can pose practical challenges but also transform school and district cultures. They formalize the strong instructional practice of gathering data and identifying expected student outcomes for every student. They also promote dialogue about student learning among teachers and between teachers and school leaders. But to achieve these positive results requires substantial training and support in all stages of the SLO process—from development to scoring—to ensure high-quality implementation. States and districts employ an array of tactics and tools to train their teachers and evaluators to create and implement student learning objectives.⁶

In-Person Training

All States implementing SLOs provide in-person training, but States have varied target audiences. Some focus their training on district administrators, relying on districts to train their teachers and evaluators, while some also train trainers who redeliver SLO information in schools and districts.

Ohio deploys a sophisticated train-the-trainer approach. SLO trainers deliver State-created modules after they receive several days of preparatory instruction for the role. State or regional delivery units around the State train the trainers. Through this approach, the Ohio Department of Education achieved geographic dispersion of SLO training (the State trained hundreds of trainers who in turn trained thousands of teachers and principals). While this approach was very effective at disseminating critical SLO training, Ohio leaders report that there were some inherent challenges: expense, workload and version control of the training modules.

⁶ The RSN has produced an [Educator Engagement Guide](#) that provides a comprehensive way to engage educators and other practitioners, including communications and professional development. This framework recognizes a progression of four domains of educator engagement that establish the teacher as an active subject, the primary actor in a sentence that begins, “I know,” “I apply,” “I participate” and “I lead.”

A different train-the-trainer approach is to appoint and train a teacher in each school to be an on-location resource for teachers as they create their SLOs. Both Austin and Houston, for example, pay teachers a small stipend to take on such leadership roles in their schools. These SLO champions come together several times a year, receive training and troubleshoot common challenges. Their districts give them facilitation materials to conduct “turnkey” trainings in their own buildings. Some States use a similar approach to deploying SLO experts in regions. Rhode Island trains a cohort of “intermediate service providers” who support teachers and administrators through the entire evaluation process in a slate of districts.

Maryland gives districts considerable flexibility in the design of their SLO systems. Thus the State uses several training tactics to support quality SLO implementation. The Maryland State Department of Education provides periodic training for district administrators on State SLO regulations and recommendations, convenes content-area leaders to brainstorm SLO approaches in their field, and deploys customizable Blackboard courses, described on page 25. The Maryland State Department of Education also engages a cadre of SLO trainers that they send to districts to lead or support their basic training for teachers regarding SLOs.

New Jersey is running a series of workshops that started at the end of the 2012–2013 school year. The workshops began with an introduction to SLOs and a specific focus on assessment development. The second in the series began in October 2013 and addressed specific implementation needs, approval protocols and procedures for writing SLOs. New Jersey designed these turnkey workshops so that attendees can train their own staff using the exact same materials provided by the **State**, along with the pedagogy and activities modeled during the workshop.

Online Training Resources and Modules

Districts and States have developed a range of online training tools as a way to make SLO guidance and training available on demand. They designed some of them to be used with groups, while others they designed for individual use. This section describes some examples.

Webinars

Some States offer SLO webinars, which are then posted online for on-demand access. **New York**, for example, provides narrated training webinars, both in video and downloadable PowerPoint slides for different audiences, including superintendents, principals and teachers. Topics include the basic SLO process for teachers and principals; how to develop SLOs for specific grades and subjects; SLO results analysis; and additional State resources.

PowerPoint Modules

States and districts provide PowerPoint-based training modules, which can be customized for use with groups or viewed as they are by individual users. **Rhode Island's** PowerPoint training modules supplement instructor-led, **in-person training** for evaluators, and they include learning exercises and discussion questions. **Georgia** and **New Jersey** provide training modules in PowerPoint format as well.

Videos

Like webinars, videos enliven the didactic, technical content of SLO training. **New York** supplements its PowerPoint modules for superintendents and districts with short, focused videos. Topics include 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, short

videos that stream directly from district Websites. Several States plan to upgrade their PowerPoint modules to videos during the 2013–2014 school year.

Online Courses

Another approach to providing SLO training online is to use online courses. With Blackboard and similar online course creation and delivery tools, the content can be mixed with exercises and quizzes. The course format for SLO training promotes user engagement, and the platform generates helpful reports about users' mastery of the material. **Maryland** has deployed a Blackboard SLO training system and reports high utilization rates and positive feedback from districts. Maryland districts adapt the modules for their context and use them to augment their homegrown materials. Some districts use them as "make-up" training for teachers who miss the official training sessions. The State provides continuing education credits for teachers who complete modules.

SLO Examples

All States and school districts implementing SLOs have developed examples for a range of grade levels and subject areas. They use these samples in conjunction with guidance documents to give teachers and evaluators illustrations of SLOs and establish expectations about how SLOs should be written. For example, **New York** and **Rhode Island** have posted sample SLOs from the field. These provide a variety of approaches. New York's are annotated, indicating notes of alignment to best practice.

To extend the successful development of these models, the RSN has created an **online library of annotated SLOs**. The library's annotated SLOs are searchable by State or subject. Each includes embedded comments about the SLO's strengths or suggests revisions that would improve the SLO.

Component 5: Ensuring Continuous Improvement

States and school districts want to improve their SLO systems continuously to make the most impact on instruction, and to make the SLO process as sensible as possible for teachers and evaluators. To do so, States can monitor implementation of SLOs and analyze their results. While States are working to ensure compliance and accountability, they also seek to improve the SLO system and its supports for teachers and evaluators.

Assessing System-Wide Quality

States implementing SLOs report that resources for monitoring implementation are very limited. Some States, faced with current resource limitations and anticipating even greater constraints once Race to the Top funding expires, anticipate that the bulk of the responsibility for SLO quality monitoring will lie with school districts. This reality raises two questions: what forms of monitoring should States prioritize, and what requirements or guidance for monitoring can they offer their districts?

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

State Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

States can use three different approaches to monitoring the quality of SLOs and SLO systems to improve them. Some States implement these approaches themselves while others contract with outside evaluators to collect the data and conduct the analysis.

- 1. Qualitative feedback from implementers about SLO tools, rules and frameworks.** These data can be collected through surveys, focus groups, evaluation forms following professional development sessions, Website or email comment collection and on-going open dialogue with teachers and evaluators. Taking action based on this feedback will generate credibility for the system. **Louisiana** collected feedback throughout the first

year on implementation of COMPASS, their new evaluation system, and one outcome of educator input is that the State will now provide student baseline data to all teachers to support their SLO target setting. Rhode Island's focus groups and surveys of teachers led them to streamline their SLO form and improve their SLO approach for special education teachers.

- 2. Analysis of SLO scores.** States can average SLO scores by content area, school and district to look for large differences that warrant further inquiry. For example, SLO score analysis might reveal that the scores in a few school districts or in a few schools are significantly higher than most districts in the State. Such differences may indicate authentic teacher potency in those locations, or they may signal that those districts or schools are setting less rigorous targets than their peers. If the State concludes that the variations do not reflect true differences in teacher effectiveness, the State can provide training, adjust guidance or change the process to promote calibration. The SLO results can also be cross-tabulated with results on other components of the evaluation system—for example, SLO scores compared to observation scores or SLO scores compared to value-added scores. Some differences among indicators may be perfectly acceptable, but large variations should trigger further inquiry. For example, high SLO scores where there are low observation results could indicate a lack of SLO rigor or they could indicate a poor implementation of the observation rubric—either way, the source of the discrepancy needs to be addressed. This form of monitoring, SLO score analysis, is cost effective and will provide invaluable data to guide PD and system adjustments that promote rigor and comparability. One national expert recommends that States prioritize the monitoring of scores over the monitoring of SLO quality (see approach #3).
- 3. SLO quality monitoring.** States can collect samples of SLOs across districts and content areas to review the degree to which they comply with

State guidance, to gauge the level of quality of the assessments upon which the SLOs are based and to compare the rigor of the targets that teachers set. The accuracy of scoring can be assessed by double-scoring sample SLOs and comparing the State's recommended score with the score that the evaluator gave. Rhode Island uses this approach. States can attach accountability to this review by requiring districts that submit noncompliant or low-quality SLOs to improve them the following year, but they may wish to wait for mature implementation to do so. In the meantime, they can use the review to drive adjustments in SLO rules, tools and training.

Most States plan, additionally, to provide guidance to districts about how they should monitor SLOs. The RSN plans to collect such guidance as it is developed and post it online.

District Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

Districts can pursue a variety of strategies to monitor the quality of SLOs and provide data to improve their SLO system.

- 1. Qualitative feedback from teachers and evaluators about SLO tools, rules and frameworks.** Where there is significant district flexibility in the design and implementation of SLOs, qualitative data should be collected from schools for district analysis. As with the State, districts can collect data through surveys, focus groups, evaluation forms following professional development sessions, Website or email comment collection and on-going open dialogue with teachers and evaluators. The most important purpose of collecting this qualitative feedback is to drive improvements to the SLO system, and authentic feedback loops also increase the credibility of SLOs among teachers.
- 2. Central SLO approval.** School districts in Georgia as well as other scattered districts around the country approve all SLOs centrally. This approach is challenging for large districts due to the quantity of SLOs, but where feasible, central SLO approval promotes consistency across schools and facilitates analysis of SLO scores since the district assures

comparably rigorous targets across teachers and schools.

- 3. Principal accountability.** Principals' skill and diligence in approving and scoring SLOs can be included in their evaluation. Factors could include timeliness of approval and scoring, quality of feedback on SLO approval forms and differentiation of SLO scores in the school as an indicator of high-quality target setting.
- 4. SLO content analysis.** Districts can analyze and compare the objective statements, targets and assessments used for SLOs across and within schools to identify discrepancies, spot innovation and assess comparability of rigor. Content directors, such as the mathematics director or the science director of the district, can best conduct this analysis since they know the curriculum and assessments used in the SLOs. When SLOs are composed on a common online platform that can generate data about particular fields in the SLO form, districts can readily analyze their SLOs.
- 5. SLO score analysis.** The district can analyze SLO outcomes through statistical analysis of all SLO scores, generating comparisons of SLO outcomes by school as well as cross-tabulations of SLO outcomes with value-added and observation scores. Wide variations would trigger a deeper inquiry. Where there is significant evaluator discretion in SLO scoring, random audits of SLO scores will help identify whether some evaluators consistently score SLOs higher or lower than their colleagues. Such variation could trigger extra scoring training. Random audits also promote honesty in scoring, since even the remote possibility of the discovery of an inflated score will deter cheating.
- 6. SLO-monitoring committee.** Districts can establish an SLO-monitoring committee to study the quality of a sample of SLOs and advise district leadership about implications of the samples for the SLO system. The committee might identify, for example, fields on the SLO template that are most challenging for teachers to implement with quality, or their review might generate ideas for SLO process adjustments.

Appendix: State Resources, by Topic

Introduction

SLO Context: Definition, Benefits, Challenges and Policy Choices

Connections with College- and Career-Ready Standards

- [Ohio SLO Template Checklist](#)
 - [Colorado Superintendent and Principal Integrated Timelines](#)
-

Component 1: Providing Guidance, Templates and Tools for Developing, Approving, and Scoring SLOs

Developing SLOs

SLO Templates

- [Rhode Island SLO Template](#)
- [Denver SLO Template](#)
- [Ohio SLO Template](#)
- [New York SLO Template](#)
- [Louisiana SLO Template](#)
- [Rhode Island SLO Element Guidance](#)
- [Louisiana SLO Element Guidance \(page 13\)](#)
- [Pennsylvania SLO Element Guidance](#)
- [Indiana SLO Template and Process \(pages 36–46\)](#)
- [Rhode Island SLO Template](#)

Approving SLOs

Approval Rubrics

- [Denver SLO Approval Rubric](#)
- [Austin SLO Rigor Rubric](#)

Approval Checklists

- [Rhode Island SLO Quality Review Tool](#)
- [Indiana SLO Approval Form](#)
- [Ohio SLO Template Checklist](#)
- [Louisiana SLO Element Guidance for Approval \(page 13\)](#)
- [RSN SLO Approval Checklist](#)

Reviewing SLO Progress

- [Indiana Mid-course Check-in Form](#)
- [Arizona Mid-course Check-in Form \(page 39\)](#)

Scoring SLOs

Delineating Performance Levels

- [Rhode Island Performance Levels \(pages 19\)](#)
- [New York Performance Levels \(page 16\)](#)

Calculating Performance Levels

Standardized Approach

- [Ohio Scoring Guidance](#)
- [Indiana Scoring Guidance \(pages 26–28\)](#)
- [Indiana Scoring Guidance \(page 19\)](#)
- [Louisiana Scoring Guidance \(pages 16–17\)](#)
- [Georgia Scoring Guidance](#)

Flexible Approach

- [Rhode Island Scoring Guidance \(pages 19–21\)](#)
- [Maryland Scoring Guidance](#)

Hybrid Approach

- [Indiana Scoring Guidance \(pages 26–28\)](#)
 - [New York Scoring Guidance \(pages 16–19\)](#)
-

Component 2: Fostering the Selection of High-Quality Assessments and Rigorous Targets

Strategies for Promoting Assessment Quality

Guidance and Training for Selecting or Developing High-Quality Assessments

- Rhode Island Assessment Worksheet
- Georgia SLO Measure Criteria Table and Table of Specifications (pages 39, 51–57)
- Ohio Assessment Guidance
- Colorado Assessment Review Tool
- Rhode Island Assessment Literacy Module
- Rhode Island Using Baseline Data to Set Targets Guide
- Rhode Island Assessment Toolkit

Assessment Banks

- Colorado Content Collaboratives Resource Bank

Identifying Pre-Approved Assessments

- Louisiana List and Rank of SLO Assessments
- New York List of Pre-approved, 3rd-Party Assessments

Setting Rigorous and Appropriate Targets

Target Setting with Baseline Data

- Ohio SLO Guidance Manual (pages 9–10)
- New Jersey SLO Guidance Manual (pages 12–14)
- Indiana SLO Target-Setting Guidance (page 19)
- Rhode Island SLO Target-Setting Guidance (page 11)
- Arizona Target-Setting Guidance (pages 26–36)

Component 3: Communicating with Teachers and Principals

- RSN SLO Communications Workbook

Content: Making the Value Proposition, Cataloging Facts and Organizing Resources

Making the Value Proposition

- New Jersey SLO Value Proposition (page 4)
- Arizona SLO Value Proposition (page 2)
- Ohio SLO Value Proposition (page 6)

Cataloging Facts

Explaining What an SLO Is

- New York SLO Definition (page 6)
- Ohio SLO Definition (page 5)
- Austin SLO Definition (page 2)
- Arizona SLO Process Visual (page 12)

- New Jersey SLO Process Visual (page 5)
- Ohio SLO Process Visual (page 8)
- Indiana SLO Assessment Visuals (pages 8-9)
- Arizona SLO Assessment Visuals (pages 26 and 32)
- Ohio Teacher Evaluation System Overview (page 4)
- Maryland State Teacher Evaluation Model (page 3)
- New Jersey Educator Evaluation System Visual

Explaining Who SLOs Affect and How

- Indiana Teacher Groups (page 4)

Explaining When Changes Take Effect and When Teachers Need to Take Certain Actions

- Indiana Timeline (page 6)
- Austin Timeline (page 6)

Organizing Resources

- Louisiana Target-Setting Guide

Format: Developing Effective Communication Pieces

Two-Page Summary

- New Jersey Two-Page Summary
- Indiana Three-Page Summary
- New Jersey Quick Start Guide

FAQs

- Ohio FAQs
- New Jersey FAQs
- Rhode Island FAQs
- Austin FAQs
- Indiana FAQs (page 12-14)

Summary PowerPoint Presentation

- Arizona Summary
- New Jersey Summary
- New York Summary

Videos

- Rhode Island SLO Video

Delivery: Reaching Target Audiences

Organizing Resources on the Web

- Austin SLO Web Page
- Denver SLO Web Page
- Georgia SLO Web Page
- New Jersey SLO Web Page
- New York SLO Web Page
- Ohio SLO Web Page
- Rhode Island Educator Evaluation Web Page
- Rhode Island SLO Web Page
- Maryland SLO Guidebook Chapters

Moving Beyond Informing Teachers and Principals Toward Inspiring Them

- RSN "4I's" Framework
- RSN Educator Engagement Guide

Component 4: Professional Development for SLO Implementation

In-Person Training

- Ohio Train-the-Trainer Modules
- New Jersey SGO Workshop Presentation
- New Jersey SGO Workshop Participant Packet

Online Training Resources and Modules

Webinars

- New York SLO Webinars

PowerPoint Modules

- Rhode Island PPT Training Modules
- Rhode Island In-Person Training

- Georgia PPT Training Module
- New Jersey PPT Training Module

Videos

- New York SLO Process Videos
- Denver SLO Video
- Austin SLO Video

Online Courses

- Maryland Blackboard SLO Materials

SLO Examples

- New York SLO Examples
- Rhode Island SLO Examples
- RSN Online Library of Annotated SLOs

Component 5: Ensuring Continuous Improvement

State Approaches to Monitoring and Continuous Improvement

- Louisiana Educator Feedback

This publication features information from public and private organizations and links to additional information created by those organizations. Inclusion of this information does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any products or services offered or views expressed, nor does the Department of Education control its accuracy, relevance, timeliness or completeness.