



## BEYOND THE NUMBERS CONVENING 2014

*Breakout Session Summary*

### Student Learning Objectives | Evaluation Challenges and Opportunities

Student Learning Objective (SLOs) are used by many states and districts to measure effective classroom instruction and evaluate teachers in non-tested grades and subjects. This session focuses on how to leverage the evaluation of SLOs to inform their design and improvement, and to promote valid and reliable evaluation systems.

**Michele Purvis, evaluation system specialist at the Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE),** talked about Georgia's approach to SLOs. Student growth makes up 50% of both the state's teacher and leader effectiveness measures (TEM and LEM). In Georgia, SLOs are district driven, so districts have lots of autonomy to determine the growth measure and target in each course, but are all supported by the state. SLOs encourage continuous improvement because assessments and growth targets can be revised every year, and growth targets can be revised after pre-assessments. This has been a huge lift for districts (one district developed 692 assessments), begging questions about whether districts have the capacity to support the process and whether SLOs are measuring what they are intended to measure. Last year, no districts used the same assessments as the year before; 36% revised public domain assessments (PDAs) while 64% wrote brand new PDAs.

Two-thirds of Georgia districts lowered growth targets based on their SLO attainment and target diagnostic data, and 94% of districts used an individualized growth formula (percentage of potential growth) rather than using tiers based on pre-assessment data. Next steps for Georgia include ensuring the integrity of the GA DOE's assessment development process, using of high quality SLO assessments, refining district-determined growth targets, and making data-driven decisions.

**Katie Buckley, a doctoral student in the quantitative policy analysis in education concentration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education,** shared a framework for evaluating SLOs. The process of evaluating SLOs is challenging because they vary so much from place to place, but they should universally be tools for measuring teachers' contributions to student learning. SLOs should be valid and reliable, closely aligned to classroom instruction, tailored to each student's performance, and free of negative unintended consequences. Practice has generally moved far ahead of research on SLOs, which is difficult because of confounding factors that make it difficult to tell what inputs are driving what outcomes. "Of course, there is no true measure of teacher effectiveness."

A good SLO evaluation should describe the purpose, goal, and use of the evaluation tool, as well as claims that can be studied and falsified. For example, student scores accurately measure student attainment of goals, and teacher instruction is improving as a result of SLO implementation. To evaluate SLOs in Georgia, Katie is studying the relationship between SLOs and mean growth percentile (MGP), the stability of teacher scores over time, and evidence of score distortion (e.g., teaching to the test or

narrowing of the curriculum). The goal is to make policy adjustments that improve the state's use of SLOs. All states and districts should use the results of such an evaluation in a formative way.

**Scott Marion, associate director at the Center for Assessment**, started by posing questions about what SLO systems claim to do, arguments for and against the systems, and positive or negative effects of the systems beyond what users claim they do. Users should identify the main goals and purposes of their SLO system, and then identify stakeholder interests and areas of concern. Scott asked participants about goals of their districts' systems. Newark shared that using state goals is required because of Race to the Top, but the district realized it lacked high-quality assessments, leading them to prioritize observations and goal-setting, not assessment data. Scott replied, "Why expect people to do really well on the assessments, when they don't even know very much about the assessment?" Atlanta asked about leveraging SLOs for district goals (as opposed to just state goals). Scott prompted districts to think about studies that would provide evaluative information about the highest-priority purposes of the SLO system. Prioritized studies should maximize the potential information value (and shed light on what we do not already know). Finally, studies should be part of a cohesive and coherent information plan.