



BEYOND THE NUMBERS CONVENING 2014

Breakout Session Summary

Student Learning Objectives | Implementation 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. Implementing SLOs is difficult because the process is relatively new, therefore requiring additional professional development, resources, and supports for teachers and administrators. These two sessions focus on the challenges of implementing SLOs, and on how to leverage the evaluation of SLOs to inform their design and improvement, and to promote valid and reliable evaluation systems.

Andrew Rice, associate director for technical projects at the Value-Added Research Center, began by suggesting that there is no single definition of SLOs or a set of best practices. These are dependent on the locality. We should, generally, use assessment to figure out where our kids are in order to improve where they could be. According to the book *Thinking Fast and Slow*, “We are prone to overestimate how much we understand about the world and to underestimate the role of chance in events.” There are two dimensions to SLOs: measurement quality and SLO process. Looking at some example SLOs, session participants agree that for growth measures to be an SLO, they should be forward-looking and teacher-owned.

Laura Jackson, district services program associate at WestEd, spoke from her experience working with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), which is in its third year of implementing SLOs. She led participants in an exercise to understand their beliefs about SLOs. One participant volunteered that SLOs should be for tested grades and subjects as well as non-tested ones. Another said that teachers should write their own SLOs, but not in isolation. In Rhode Island, SLOs were influenced by the size of the state and its districts, regulations, available assessments, and other contextual factors.

SLOs have the dual purpose of accountability and instruction. They should contribute to teacher evaluation, but also be meaningful and valuable to teachers. They should also reflect teachers’ work at goal-setting and progress-monitoring. This requires balancing competing needs, such as consistency versus personalization and rigor versus attainability. Rhode Island encourages erring on the side of instruction, personalization, and rigor based on the theory that these choices will best serve students. Laura closed out by allowing educators to speak about using SLOs.

Jessica Delforge, educator quality specialist at RIDE, spoke about the gap between the model’s intent and implementation. The state did not anticipate all of the events that would arise, such as collective bargaining, teacher contract requirements, and the lack of a comprehensive data system. Difficulties during the SLOs process have also shed light on other issues affecting reform.

Charlie DePascale, senior associate at the Center for Assessment, spoke about the importance of communicating the purpose of SLOs. Rhode Island is working on proficiency and personalization, starting with performance-based graduation requirements. The state is also bringing accountability to schools and classrooms by working on determining proficiency in six subjects and increasing schools' ability to define proficiency. SLOs have been a natural extension of this effort.

Jessica continued that being in schools and talking with educators highlighted other issues. Some teachers couldn't define the core skills their students needed to move to the next grade. In some subjects (e.g., art) teachers lacked a set curriculum. Three particular challenges have been firming up teachers' foundational sense of curriculum, standards, assessments, and data; providing professional development to accurately message the SLOs process; and ensuring comparability and quality while providing everyone access to the same tool. Jessica concluded by guiding participants in group work around these three challenges and potential solutions for each. Participants shared their experiences and brainstormed ways that any states or districts could work through these challenges.