Teacher SLOs: Applying a Quality Continuum

Increasing Student Achievement, Advancing Teacher Practice

***About this document**:* This document provides guidance in using a quality continuum for Teacher SLOs. It is intended to support teachers, school administrators, and district and state leaders in the use of an instrument to measure SLO quality.

***About the Community Training and Assistance Center (CTAC)**:* CTAC is a national nonprofit organization with a demonstrated 36-year record of success in the fields of education and community development. Working at local, state, and national levels, CTAC achieves significant, long-term improvements in areas such as student achievement, teacher and principal effectiveness, school and district turnaround, and organizational capacity. CTAC introduced Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) nationally through a groundbreaking partnership with the Denver Public Schools and Denver Classroom Teachers Association. SLOs are now being implemented in more than 30 states across thousands of school districts in the United States. CTAC has more than 16 years of national leadership experience providing technical assistance, informing practice and policy, and evaluating SLOS.

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Applying a Teacher SLO Rubric

Why a rubric?

Research: Research makes clear that the quality of an SLO matters. CTAC's two major longitudinal studies show both a statistically and practically significant relationship between SLO quality and increases in student academic growth. The studies also indicate that educators improve the quality of their SLOs over time. A quality continuum, therefore, helps to advance teacher practice and increase student learning.

Alternatives: Note that variations of a quality continuum are possible. The key is to help better meet the needs of a state or district when providing guidance to educators. A full rubric, with element descriptors for each quality level, provides clear guidance and expectations. A state or district can start with a detailed quality continuum or it can phase in more detailed rubrics over time. There are additional alternatives that are less rigorous for purposes of informing practice. For example, some have found it helpful to provide a set of guiding questions. Such questions usually include a set of strategic probes for educators to think about in regards to SLO elements, but they do not include rating levels. Others sometimes use a checklist that might include a single level of quality, often a level three set of descriptors. A checklist allows for the single level of performance to be "checked off" as being met.

The national track record in SLO implementation shows that a quality continuum provides the highest level of rigor and is the most helpful in improving the quality of educator practice. When choosing among alternatives, the purpose of the instrument should be clear: quality matters.

Who should use the rubric?

Teachers: As crafters of the SLO, it is essential for teachers to have clear expectations for their SLOs. SLOs demonstrate a number of key teacher practices. Accordingly, it should not be expected that a "perfect score" is to be attained. Rather, teachers can analyze the substance and expectations of the quality continuum, aim for the highest level, and discuss with administrators where their practice currently stands—as well as how to advance that practice.

School Administrators: A key function of school administrators is to provide leadership which improves instruction. School administrators can use the rubric to discuss with teachers their professional practices. Aligning the evidence found in an SLO to expectations described in the quality continuum promotes the effective use of evidence-based pedagogy. Similarly, aligning SLO evidence to expectations for observations of practice also helps to further this goal. The quality rating rubric can serve as a centerpiece for professional conversations, helping teachers both to define their current level of practice, and advance it.

State and District Leaders: State and district leaders can use a quality continuum to clarify expectations, strengthen practice, and to monitor SLO implementation. From a systemic level, it is important to provide training around key quality continuum language and calibration to consistently define the levels of quality. To support this goal, we have included a sample rubric and definitions.

Applying a Teacher SLO Rubric

Key Rubric Language by Element

Baseline and Trend Data

- **Baseline evidence**: Provides information from the pre-assessment or other assessment(s) used to determine an initial point in time for student learning.

Student Population(s)

- **Specific characteristics**: Details more targeted descriptions, demonstrating diagnostic abilities versus citing broad descriptions (e.g., Students are below grade level (general) or lower than last year's students (general) versus cannot represent quantities symbolically (specific) or need to stay on topic when writing narratives (specific)).
- **Abilities**: States what students have learned and can do and are often academic in nature (e.g., read well, identify letters, jump hurdles).
- **Experiences**: Indicates students' history inside or outside the school building (e.g., had hands-on instruction, never used a microscope, moved from a nearby district).
- **Interests**: Demonstrates knowledge of what students enjoy or prefer inside or outside the school building (e.g., enjoy animal readings, participate in after-school sports).
- **Needs**: Articulates things students need to learn and are often academic in nature (e.g., have difficulty making connections, struggle to see different points of view).

Interval of Instruction

- **Allows for depth and complexity**: Provides enough time for the standards to be learned fully at a deep level, enabling students to grasp the idiosyncrasies and unique features of the content to apply the learning in a variety of contexts outside the classroom.
- **Articulates a learning progression**: Describes a brief sequence of key learnings that will ultimately result in students fully learning the selected standards (e.g., Students will first take a viewpoint on a topic and defend it with evidence, then analyze others' viewpoints on the same based on evidence, and ultimately craft an argumentative paper on a topic acknowledge both their claim and counterclaims, basing their final position on evidence.).

Learning Content

- **Course**: Provides either the grade and subject (e.g., Grade 4 ELA) or in other cases, elective titles (e.g., Introduction to Keyboarding) or other class titles (e.g., Physics).
- **Applicable standards**: Provides the district-approved document from which standards are located (e.g., *Maryland's College and Career-Ready Standards).*
- **Most specific level**: Indicates the most specific level of course content articulated in applicable standards (e.g., "SL.1.1.a" for Grade 1 ELA).
- **Focused**: Selects between two and up to half of the overall content items (at the most specific level).
- **Coherent**: Includes content selections through which a common thread can be drawn, and includes no outlying content. Often, specific content areas can have expected components, such as blending science process standards with content standards, incorporating multiple strands of ELA (e.g., reading, writing, language), or blending performance with knowledge (e.g., in the arts or physical education).
- **Pivotal**: States how important the content is for students. This is often considered from a content perspective (e.g., Students need this content to be successful in the next course) and a real-time data perspective (e.g., these students need this content in light of pre-assessment data).

Key Rubric Language by Element (continued)

Assessment

- **Aligns all aspects**: Aligns items to the selected standards. The evidence of growth and baseline evidence should also align to each other in terms of structure, length, and depth of content.
- **Higher-order items**: Includes items that are at the upper half of the commonly used cognition levels (e.g., Webb's Depth of Knowledge and the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy).
- **Performance items**: Includes items where students must provide a response, as opposed to where students select a response. (i.e., performance items in the written, oral, visual, or physical performance domains).
- **Multiple measures**: Ensures that for each standard (or item) in the learning content, students have more than one opportunity to demonstrate the learning of the standard (or item). (e.g., 7 of the 13 standards in the selected learning content have more than one assessment item measuring them, which meets the criteria for "most" content being measured by more than one item.)
- **Scoring methodology:** Articulates the way that final scores will be calculated for each student (e.g., each multiple choice item will count 2 points for the correct answer found on the answer key. Each short response item will count up to three points for a fully complete answer with partial credit given according to the scoring guide. All points will be totaled together and divided over 80 to yield a final percent correct on the assessment.).
- **Scoring materials:** This usually consists of answer keys, scoring guides, and/or rubrics.

Instructional Strategies

- **Key strategies**: Identifies core approaches to instruction that will carry throughout the interval. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a few pivotal strategies that will form the overall approach to instruction of the learning content (e.g., balanced literacy, hands-on instruction).
- **Aligned to the learning content**: Identified strategies are matched appropriately with the selected standards
- **Describes**: Portrays beyond just identifying the strategy how the strategy will be used in the classroom. (e.g., Two SLOs may indicate "inquiry" as a key strategy. In the descriptions we would learn that one approach involves teacher-generated questions that students independently and silently work on, while another approach uses student-generated questions where collaboration and justification to peers based on evidence will be used.)
- **Key strategies**: **Demonstrates evidence of effectiveness**: Justifies why the identified strategies are being used, and is strong enough to convince the reader (e.g., I received professional development in using this strategy, this is a district or school focus strategy for our school this year) that the strategies are effective.
- **Ongoing plan for using data to inform instruction**: Includes a summary statement of how the teacher plans to use ongoing reflection of data to inform instruction. This includes the data to be reviewed (usually formative assessments), the frequency of use for the data to ensure it is ongoing, how reflection will take place, and how it will inform instruction. (e.g., I will review the bi-weekly formative assessments to analyze the progress on student learning and make adjustments in my teaching as I reflect collaboratively with my colleagues.)

Growth Target

- **Unacceptable rigor**: Holds a rigor level for students that is far below school and/or district expectations and should not be permitted in an SLO.
- **Low rigor**: Holds a rigor level for students that is below school and/or district expectations but may be permissible given the overall rigor of the other SLO elements and context.
- **Sufficient rigor**: Holds a rigor level for students that meets school and/or district expectations and is suitable for approval.
- **High rigor**: Holds a rigor level for students that exceeds school and/or district expectations yet is realistic given the context of the SLO.

Rationale

- **Thinking behind the SLO development**: Articulates the thinking process that led to the SLO selections, which often focuses on why the student population, learning content, strategies, and evidence of growth are the best selections given all other information.
- **College and career readiness**: States how the content sets students up to be successful in college and careers (e.g., Learning this content enables to students to demonstrate proficiency in computer applications, which is needed in subsequent coursework even into college and is an important skill set in virtually every career students could pursue.).