

FAQ

Updated October 2013



1. What are NTSG?

NTSG are non-tested subjects and grades. Courses and grades are listed as NTSG when a state standardized test does not exist to measure student learning. About 70% of the subjects and grades are NTSG. Educators of these subjects/courses/grades need to have a way to measure evidence of student growth and learning since state tests are not available.

2. What is an SLO? What are the components of an SLO?

An SLO is a content area grade or course-specific measurable learning objective that can be used to document student learning over a defined period of time. In essence, learning goals are established for students, their progress is monitored toward these goals, and then the degree to which educators help students achieve these goals is evaluated. The three components of the SLO are: *Learning Goals, Assessments, and Targets*. SLOs will be used for measuring student growth in NTSG. They may also be used in tested subjects and grades (TSG) at LEA discretion.

3. How will SLOs be comparable from school to school and district to district across the state?

Our intent is to mitigate as many variables as possible that could obstruct the comparability and consistency of the SLO process. Unfortunately, the process will never be perfect. Local districts will need to be involved in the development of structures and practices that increase comparability and consistency. The *USOE SLO Guidance Document* makes the following recommendations to assist with maximizing the comparability of the SLO process:

- Statewide SLOs in NTSG shall be available and used in 2014-15;
- The statewide *SLO template* shall be used to establish SLOs;
- The *Utah Rubric for Assessing the Quality of Student Learning Objectives* shall be used statewide;
- A *USOE SLO Review Process* will be created to assist districts in the SLO process and maintain as much consistency across the state as possible;
- Each district shall establish a framework for ensuring that SLOs across the district are as comparable as possible;
- Part of the required district framework will include a *Local Review Process* that will provide information to the *State Review Process*;
- The school principal is responsible for the consistency and approval of all building SLOs; districts should provide professional development to building administrators to increase the likelihood of school to school consistency.

4. How will districts ensure that assessments are valid and reliable, and who will determine the quality of the assessments?

Educators should rely on the highest quality assessments available. Assessments should be aligned with the *Learning Goal*. We can expect that in the beginning it will be challenging to find and identify quality assessments to evaluate SLOs. The Center for Assessment has created a *High Quality Assessment Review Tool* that identifies components that should be noted in validating quality measures of student growth. Districts will be invited to participate in professional development on identifying and assessing quality assessments during the 2013-14 school-year.

In addition, *statewide SLOs for NTSG* will include the assessments to measure the *Learning Goals*. Districts will also have the latitude to design and use locally developed quality assessments.

5. Who is responsible for writing SLOs?

Currently, teams of NTSG content area specialists, district leaders, and content area writers from around the state are involved in writing statewide SLOs and other example SLOs that will be included in a bank of SLOs from which educators may choose. Eventually, educators will write their own SLOs and district developed SLOs will be encouraged. The NTSG content areas that have been writing SLOs this school-year are: *Social Studies, Fine Arts, CTE, and Special Education*. English Language Arts, ELL, and Advanced Learner specialists have been included as part of the content area writing groups to integrate content literacy and student subgroup needs into the SLOs. During the 2013-14 school-year NTSG content areas that will be writing SLOs are: *Early Childhood, Health, PE, and Science K-3*.

6. Who is responsible for evaluating the quality of an SLO?

Ultimately the school administrator will be responsible for evaluating the quality of the educator's SLO. Criteria for rating the quality of Student Learning Objectives are detailed in the *Utah Rubric for Assessing the Quality of SLOs*. The rubric will be used to assess all aspects of the Student Learning Objective including: *The Learning Goals, Assessments and Scoring, and Targets*.

7. Who will be evaluated using SLOs? How many SLOs are required? Will that number increase over time? Will educators that teach tested subjects and grades do SLOs?

Educators in *tested subjects and grades (TSG)* for which there is a state standardized test (as well as a state test in the same subject the previous year), will measure student learning using the analytic method of *Student Growth Percentiles (SGP)*. Educators in *non-tested subjects and grades (NTSG)* shall include a *minimum of two SLOs* for the 2014-2015 school-year (one individual is required, and one shared SLO is recommended.) This number **may** increase over time. At this point, no recommendation is being made about when additional SLOs may be required. Districts, however, have the option to require more than two SLOs.

It is recommended that all *NTSG and TSG* shall be included in shared SLOs (the attribution of the results shared by all at the level decided by the school and/or district). However, it will be a district option as to whether tested subjects and grades are required to do individual and shared SLOs.

8. What is shared attribution?

The term "*shared attribution*" refers to results of a measure of student growth that will be shared by a group of educators. This sharing of results of student learning could take place at the department, team (i.e., PLC), school, or district level. If teachers are "*sharing attribution*" in a specific grade or subject area, they would include that focus in their SLOs. For example, all teachers across a grade level might focus on an ELA skill like written communication, regardless of what subject they teach.

The first step in implementing any sort of *shared attribution* involves a careful articulation of the school's improvement goals and the theory of action that guides the school's efforts toward improvement.

9. How will SLOs look different for educators teaching courses or subjects that are only one semester vs. those teaching courses that go the entire year?

SLOs need to be approved within *six weeks* of the course start date. Teachers of semester courses would also be allowed this six week time period to get to know their students and set appropriate targets for the *Learning Goals*.

10. If an educator teaches multiple subjects, do they choose which courses and content areas to write SLOs?

Educators choose the subjects and courses for which they will write SLOs. They are not required to be written for every course or subject that is taught. In consultation with the administration (and possibly the PLC, department, and team), the decision about which subjects should have an SLO is a joint decision.

11. How much latitude will educators and districts have in changing the statewide SLOs? Will educators be allowed to write their own SLOs?

The flexibility in the statewide SLOs is in the *contextualization of the targets and the differentiation of instructional strategies*. Statewide SLOs are created to provide more comparability and consistency as we begin the SLO process and use evidence of student learning through the use of SLOs. The greatest benefit of SLOs, however, is that they are created by educators and show consideration for the varying needs of the students in the classroom. *Contextualization of SLOs* is allowed and will be recorded on the *statewide SLO template*. The administration at the school and district levels approves of the contextualization.

Statewide SLOs will be used the first year of implementation to assist with the evaluation of the SLO system and to determine weights, validity, and reliability. Additional SLOs, individually developed, may also be used at the discretion of the districts during and after the first year of implementation.

12. Will the state provide professional development to districts and what might this look like?

The USOE will provide districts PD on 1) *the SLO process*, 2) *how to write SLOs*, and 3) *how to oversee the framework for mitigating comparability and consistency concerns*. Each district has provided the name of one person who will act as the *LEA SLO Specialist* in the district and serve as the liaison between the district and the state. The *LEA SLO Specialist* will be the leader of the district SLO team and receive training during the 2013-14 school-year. Professional development information will be provided to district curriculum directors.

13. What will the Student Growth pilot entail? Who will participate in the pilot? What is the timeline for the project?

The details for the pilot have been finalized and districts piloting observation measurement tools have been asked to also pilot *content area SLOs*. Other districts and charters adopting *USOE model observation tools* have also been invited to participate in the *SLO pilot*. Educators in these districts who teach the content areas in which SLOs have been developed will be asked to *pilot NTSG statewide SLOs* the second semester of 2013-14. *Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs)* will also be piloted for validity and reliability.

The observation measurement tools developed by the state are being piloted along with stakeholder surveys and SLOs/SGPs in 2013-14. All districts must implement the components of multiple measures as required by Board Rule R277-531 in 2014-15. Measures of student growth, professional performance, and stakeholder input will be weighted to determine a summative rating every three years. Formative evaluations will take place every year and an annual rating will be submitted to the state to meet state and federal requirements.

14. How will SLOs affect my evaluation?

Evidence of student learning is documented through the data collected on the achievement of *learning targets* (targets may be different for individual or groups of students set by the educator). The rating that an educator receives on the accomplishment of the targets will be weighted and applied to the educator's summative evaluation rating.

15. How will student growth be weighted in educator evaluation?

Decisions regarding specific weighting have not been determined. After the initial SLO and SGP pilot, the weights will be determined. The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) will make the decisions about the weight of evaluation measures, including the weight of student growth.

16. Why use SLOs?

SLOs are recognized as a way to address the problem of measuring growth associated with non-tested subject and grades (NTSG). They provide an analytic method for determining student growth and attributing the growth to the educator(s) identified in NTSG.

SLOs are more than a means to evaluating educators, however. They are designed to strengthen teaching and improve student learning. Many districts are using SLOs in both tested and non-tested subjects and grades because it encourages teachers and administrators to work collaboratively to analyze instructional practices and adjust strategies to better meet student needs. By using SLOs, meaningful conversations occur and strategic choices about future professional development take place.