SLO Target Setting:
Field-tested Practical Guidance

Increasing Student Achievement, Advancing Teacher Practice

About this document: This document is intended to assist practitioners in the setting and reviewing of student growth targets in an SLO model. It lays out a suggested three-step pathway and provides an example for applying these steps.

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The following highlights a field-tested pathway for using multiple data sources and growth methodologies to set meaningful targets in an SLO. It places students, and the teacher's knowledge of students, at the core of target setting.
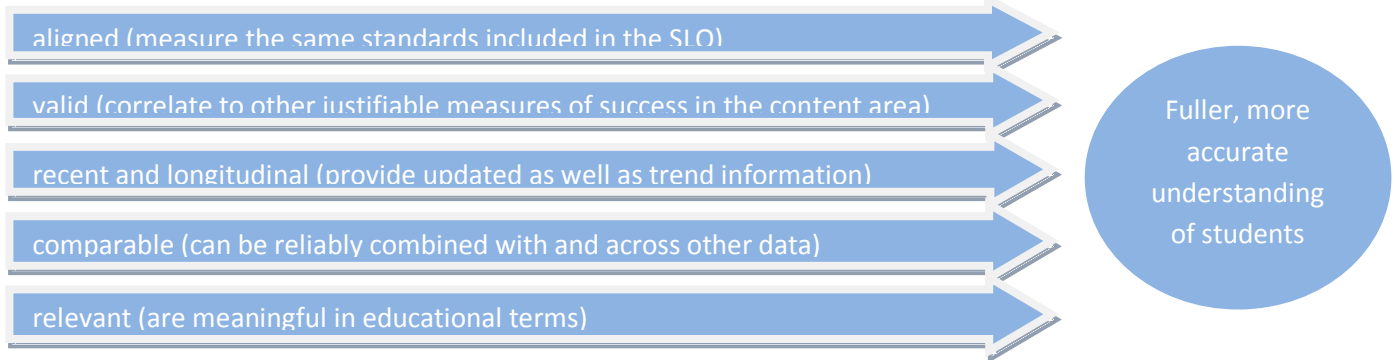
1 Collect and make sense of student data

When building a thorough knowledge of students, examine several types of baseline and descriptive data. These may include:

Achievement	Contextual	Survey	Social/Behavioral
• Pre-assessment(s) • Early course work • Standardized test scores • Interim benchmarks and EOCs • Authentic student portfolios • Report cards • Prior SLOs	• District expectations • Free and reduced lunch status • English Language Learner data • Course enrollment • Student exceptionalities • Attendance data	• Interests • Perceptions • Learning preferences	• Perceptual data • Report card information • Student interviews

When setting SLO targets, data are most informative when they are…

aligned (measure the same standards included in the SLO)

valid (correlate to other justifiable measures of success in the content area)

recent and longitudinal (provide updated as well as trend information)

comparable (can be reliably combined with and across other data)

relevant (are meaningful in educational terms)

Fuller, more accurate understanding of students

Research shows that it is the thinking process that matters when teachers craft SLOs. Teachers take the data they have examined and weigh the relative value of each kind of data.

For instance…

An eighth grade Spanish I teacher gathers and examines the following data about her students:

- **Achievement**: Previous final exams for ELA and social studies, pre-assessment scores
- **Contextual**: District expectations, ELL status, student exceptionalities, attendance data
- **Survey**: Background knowledge and experience survey of Spanish language
- **Social/Behavioral**: Initial student conferences, teacher perceptions to date

After reviewing these data, the teacher believes the pre-assessment, aligned to the SLO's content, needs to play a strong role in target setting. She also understands the district expectation that students should reach 65 percent on the summative assessment. She feels the previous ELA exam scores, due to their comparability, inform the SLO target setting by indicating students' previous performance in and experience with school.

2 Analyze the implications of different approaches for students

Based on national experience, here are some target setting approaches which can be used individually or in combination. Each approach has pros and cons. Their effective use depends on having definitions of expected growth that are widely understood and accepted within a district. They also require teachers, and those who are approving the SLOs, to think through the implications of the approach(es) for all students.

Common Growth

Students are expected to grow by a common amount (e.g., each student grows by 20 points)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	50 of 100	70 of 100
B	70 of 100	90 of 100
C	55 of 100	75 of 100

Growth to Mastery

Students grow to a common level of mastery (e.g., each student grows to the target of 7 points)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	3 of 10	7 of 10
B	2 of 10	7 of 10
C	4 of 10	7 of 10

Banded

Students are grouped with each group growing a common amount (e.g., students with high baseline scores grow by 2 points, while those with low scores grow by 4)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	8/10 (high)	10 of 10
B	6/10 (high)	8 of 10
C	3/10 (low)	7 of 10

Status

Students grow a specified amount on a more holistic measure (e.g., from one level to the next; this could also be shown as maintaining the same achievement level on a more difficult assessment)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	Emerging	Proficient
B	Proficient	Exceeding
C	Novice	Emerging

Half the Gap

Students grow half of the performance gap to the maximum (e.g., each student achieves half of the points between their initial score and the maximum score)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	10 of 100	55 of 100
B	75 of 100	88 of 100
C	50 of 100	75 of 100

Individualized

Students grow differing amounts based on teachers' analysis and rationale (e.g., two students whose baseline was "3" have a different target based, in part, on non-quantified factors)

Student	Baseline	Target
A	2 of 8	4 of 8
B	3 of 8	5 of 8
C	3 of 8	6 of 8

When analyzing these approaches, be sure to consider:
- What learning is occurring if students meet expectations, and is it meaningful?
- How viable are the approaches given the students' starting points and baselines?
- How are different types of data, and different scales, going to be combined?
- How does the approach fit with the district expectations for growth?

3 Set targets for each student

After making sense of the student data, and analyzing and selecting the different target setting approaches, the next step is to set rigorous and realistic targets for each student. There needs to be a defensible rationale for the targets.

The eighth grade Spanish I teacher set her targets and provided the accompanying rationale:

Student	ELL Status	Identified Disabilities	Grade 6 ELA	Grade 7 ELA	Grade 6 Soc. St.	Grade 7 Soc. St.	Pre-Assessment	Growth Target
Abrams			3	5	84	92	43	90
Brock			2	3	74	80	40	80
DeLeon			3	2	88	65	20	60
Fletcher			5	5	92	94	40	90
Hampton		LD (math)	3	3	78	78	30	90
Johansen			2	2	70	73	30	65
Nguyen	Level 5		1	2	64	75	25	70

She highlighted the following key points related to her target setting:

- For Fletcher, Abrams and Brock, the different data points are more consistent and seem to indicate a similar trajectory.
- Nguyen's recent increase in performance justifies a higher target than others with the same pre-assessment score.
- DeLeon's performance data are trending downward. This trend can be reversed significantly, but achieving the district's expectation of 65 is not likely.
- Hampton is fluent in French which will likely enable an easier acquisition of Spanish. His learning disability in math should not affect learning Spanish.
- Johansen is not doing well in ELA but is doing well in social studies. Is there something about ELA that is difficult for this student? Does the student prefer social studies?

Pathway for Target Setting

Target setting begins with developing a full and accurate understanding of students, then involves analyzing and selecting target setting approaches, and leads to setting specific targets for each student.

Research shows that the SLO as a whole, and the target setting component in particular, need to meet three standards of validity: statistical, educational and political. *Statistical validity,* in this context, means that student academic growth is demonstrable. *Educational validity* means that meeting the growth target makes sense to frontline educators. *Political validity* means that the target setting is perceived as fair. Addressing these three kinds of validity is important for purposes of institutionalizing new teacher evaluation systems and improving teacher and student performance.