Principal SLOs: Applying a Quality Rating Rubric

Increasing Student Achievement, Advancing Leadership Practice

About this document: This document provides guidance in using a quality rating rubric for Principal SLOs. It is intended to support principals, their evaluators, and other executive 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 35-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 15 years of national leadership experience providing technical assistance, informing practice and policy, and evaluating SLOS.

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 rating rubric, therefore, helps to advance teacher practice and increase student learning.

Alternatives: Note that variations of a quality rating rubric 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 rubric 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 rating rubric provides the highest level of rigor and is 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?

Principals: The traits of the rubric highlight important traits of school leadership for specific elements in principal SLOs. Principals can use the language of the rubric to help inform their SLOs as well as their overall leadership approach. The quality rating rubric can serve as a centerpiece for professional conversations between principals and their evaluators, ultimately helping principals both to define their current level of practice, and advance it.

Principal Evaluators: As the rubric contains many important traits of effective school leadership, evaluators of principals can use the rubric to gather evidence of principals' leadership strategies found in their SLOs. Using the *Maryland's Instructional Leadership Framework* as the evaluative lens, the quality of the SLO combined with evidence in practice and other artifacts can be analyzed together to help inform and improve principal practice.

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

Key Rubric Language by Element

Rationale
- **Identifies the student population:** A clear group of students in the school is identified (e.g., all 8th grade students)
- **Reasoning 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.).

Data Review & Baseline Evidence
- **Baseline evidence**: Provides information from the pre-assessment or other assessment(s) used to determine an initial point in time for student learning.
- **Data from related instructional staff**: Information gleaned from the staff related to the focus of the SLO (e.g., "The 5th grade teachers report during the first few weeks of school their students struggle most with craft and structure in their reading analyses and focus in their writing" for an SLO focused on those areas.)

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).

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.

Key Rubric Language by Element (continued)

Evidence of Growth

- **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.)

Strategies

- **Strategies and/or initiatives for related instructional staff**: Identifies core leadership endeavors that will carry throughout the interval to support teachers of the targeted students. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather one or two pivotal endeavors that will help students and staff realize the targets set in the SLO. (e.g., training in guided reading, weekly coaching support from the instructional lead).
- **Describes**: Portrays beyond just identifying a strategy or initiative what it entails and how it will be carried out in the school. (e.g., "Training in new technology" could be that a teacher can self-select to participate in a one-time webinar found by the principal with no follow-up or could also be a new and effective technology funded by the district that the principal is directing the teacher to attend as a school leader, who will receive follow-up training and support through a district technology specialist.)
- **Data-informed rationale**: Justifies why an identified strategy or approach is being used, and is strong enough to convince the reader (e.g., research supports the use of co-teaching for struggling students, this is a school approach we have taken in the past that yielded significant increases in student learning) that the strategies are effective.
- **Plan for the direct monitoring of and providing feedback**: Includes a plan with the following features: the principal himself or herself will be monitoring the instruction of the targeted students directly and regularly; feedback will be provided by the principal to the teachers of targeted students. Higher quality plans include how the plans were derived and ensure feedback is incorporated and discussed as instruction progresses.