

## Student Learning Objectives Frequently Asked Questions

In accordance with Ohio Revised Code and State Board of Education Framework

### Ohio Teacher Evaluation System (OTES) Overview

Ohio's new system for evaluating teachers will provide educators with a richer and more detailed view of their performance, with a focus on specific strengths and opportunities for improvement. The new system relies on two key evaluation components, each weighted at 50 percent: a rating of teacher performance and a rating of student academic growth.

The challenge for measuring student growth is that there is not a single student assessment that can be used for all teachers. Local education agencies (LEAs) must use data from the state Ohio Achievement Assessments when available. If those are not applicable for a given subject or grade, LEAs can choose to use other assessments provided by national testing vendors and approved for use in Ohio. For subjects in which traditional assessments are not an option – such as art or music – LEAs should establish a process to create student learning objectives (SLOs) to measure student progress in those courses.

### Implementation

**Q: Do all teachers have to write student learning objectives?**

**A:** No. According to law, teachers exclusively instructing Value-Added courses must use their teacher-level report as the full 50 percent for the student growth measure beginning July 2014. All other teachers can use student learning objectives as part of their student growth measures per the district plan.

**Q: Does the Department approve the student learning objectives?**

**A:** The Department will not collect or approve student learning objectives at the state level. It recommends that an existing district or building committee become trained to review, provide feedback, and ultimately approve student learning objectives. The composition of this approval committee is a local decision.

**Q: How many student learning objectives do I have to write?**

**A:** If you are using student learning objectives as a growth measure, the Department requires a minimum of two and recommends no more than four which are representative of your schedule and student population. This guideline also applies to both Category B and Category A2 teachers if your district or school has determined these teachers will also be using local measures.

**Q: Do I have to write a student learning objective for each course that I teach?**

**A:** Not necessarily. The student learning objectives should be representative of your teaching schedule and student population. Whenever feasible, all students you instruct should be covered by a student learning objective. Within the guideline of two to four student learning objectives, it is a local decision as to the exact number you will write and which courses should be covered. For example, for a self-contained 3rd grade teacher who instructs all four core subjects, a district may make a local decision to focus student learning objectives on reading and math only.

**Q: What is the average length of a student learning objective?**

**A:** The length is not the important factor. Quality over quantity is the consideration. The focus of the student learning

objective is on the content. When writing the student learning objective, you should use the provided checklist to ensure it contains all of the required information needed for approval at the local level.

## Baseline and Trend Data

**Q: The baseline and trend data section is sometimes written vaguely using "most," "several," and "struggled". Is this acceptable?**

**A:** If used alone, vague words like those mentioned in the question above are insufficient to describe baseline data. Whenever possible, the description of the baseline and trend data should include student performance data, such as a table showing the range and frequency of student scores. You should make written observations based on the data in this section. However, there must be data included.

**Q: What if my data are unrelated to my subject or do not exist?**

**A:** All teachers can find data relevant to their course. The rare exception to this may be a first year teacher or a teacher new to a course. Data may be from related subjects if the subject is new to students. For example, biology teachers may glean useful information from reviewing last year's environmental science examination. In addition, although students may not have received formal instruction in a subject, students may have background knowledge acquired from outside the school setting. A brief survey could also provide information about students' background knowledge. You should use the first couple of weeks to gather data about your students. During this time, give a pre-assessment or the first chapter or unit exam to provide valuable data for the student learning objective.

**Q: Should student learning objectives be based on data from standardized tests or teacher-created assessments?**

**A:** Student learning objectives should be based on data from multiple sources when available such as standardized tests, portfolios of student work, and district-created assessments.

**Q: Can I use data that is two or three years old?**

**A:** Yes. Using performance data from multiple years can provide valuable information. For example, trend data may show that students in your class for the past three years struggled with converting fractions. Based upon this finding, you might include this skill in your student learning objective and then seek new instructional strategies for teaching fractions.

**Q: Do I create student learning objectives after the school year has started and after I have given assessments to determine a baseline?**

**A:** Student learning objectives are typically developed after the school year has begun so that you can use your diagnostics or pre-assessments to develop the student learning objectives. However, sections of the student learning objective, such as "standards and content" and "assessment," may be completed prior to the start of the school year.

**Q: Should I use prior content or current content to create baseline data?**

**A:** Your baseline data will vary based on the subject and the availability of data. You may use a pre-assessment as a source of baseline data. The pre-assessment will contain the content and skills to be taught during the upcoming year. Other sources of data are end-of-course assessments from the prior year, which are not being based on the current content but may be good proxies for the current course.

# Student Population

**Q: How do I determine the student population? What portion of my student population or roster do I include?**

**A:** The student population includes all the students enrolled in a course whenever possible. An additional “focused” or “targeted” student learning objective may be created for a subgroup of students within the course who need targeted assistance. At least one of your student learning objectives must cover all the students enrolled in a course except in rare cases when you may have a very large student population.

**Q: Can I exclude students with disabilities from my student learning objective?**

**A:** Difficulty in achieving the targets is not a reason to exclude any subgroup of students.

**Q: What if a student joins my class late in the year or withdraws from my class early?**

**A:** The expectation is that all students entering a course throughout the year receive a pre-assessment to determine any gaps in learning. Every effort should be made to administer the post-assessment to each student enrolled in the course. These data are extremely beneficial to the next year’s teacher. The Department expects each district to determine the minimum interval of instruction for student learning objectives. Understandably, you and your principal will need to discuss whether certain students meet these minimum requirements determined by your district.

**Q: What if students in my student population are absent frequently? Will they be excluded from the calculation of my student learning objective score?**

**A:** Currently, per Ohio law, students who have 60 or more unexcused absences are excluded from final calculations of your score for Value-Added. Districts should remove students with sixty or more unexcused absences from their Approved Vendor Assessment and LEA measures. Additionally, for student learning objectives, districts should utilize the relevant interval of instruction as defined by the LEA.

**Q: What happens if I teach a class where my students change on a regular basis? What if I have different students every quarter or every few weeks?**

**A:** The Department expects each district to determine the minimum interval of instruction for student learning objectives. It is understood that you and your principal will need to discuss whether certain students meet these minimum requirements. Therefore, this situation requires some flexibility within the district’s student growth measure plan because your schedule and assignment may require adaptations to the student learning objective process. Adaptions can be put in place to make the process work for you. The danger is that some students are not included in the student learning objective. Teachers, principals, and districts should try to avoid this. Remember that you should strive to show growth in as many students as possible. You should avoid any situations that exclude particular students who are low or high performing.

If you are a teacher who sees students for various lengths of time and at various points throughout the year, you can design a student learning objective around big ideas and content. Then you establish tiered targets based on the amount of time a student receives instruction. Expectations for students who are in the course for longer periods of time should be different than those for students on shorter intervals. This means that you should keep a roster of all students, possibly sorted by length of instruction throughout the school year.

**Q: How do I write a student learning objective as a teacher of 450 students?**

**A:** In cases where a teacher has large student populations, it is recommended that the district plan guides the administration and you to focus the student learning objective in a manner that encompasses as many students as possible. The district plan should strive for comparability and consistency across subject and grade levels regarding the total number of student learning objectives per teacher as well as the size of the student population.

## Interval of Instruction

**Q: Is the interval of instruction one curriculum unit or the entire school year?**

**A:** Match the interval of instruction with the length of the course. This may be a year, semester, trimester, or a quarter. Districts with buildings using intervals of instruction other than a typical school year will need multiple approval periods for their student learning objectives. For instance, in a high school using semesters, the approval committee would meet both at the beginning of the school year and again at the new semester to approve student learning objectives for their teachers.

**Q: My school year ends on June 1. Does this mean my interval of instruction for my yearlong course ends on June 1?**

**A:** No. State law requires the completion of the evaluation process by May 1. The Department recommends that you administer your post-assessments on or around April 15. This will allow adequate time to score the assessments, complete the Student Learning Objective Scoring Template, and submit the data to the evaluator by May 1.

**Q: I am a high school teacher instructing Algebra I and Algebra II in year-long courses. I also teach Trigonometry first semester and Calculus second semester. My district has decided all high school teachers will write only two student learning objectives. How do I decide on which courses to focus my two student learning objectives?**

**A:** If you instruct large numbers of courses, the district plan should guide the administration to work with you to identify the required courses as a focus for the student learning objectives. If this does not help narrow the focus to the required number of student learning objectives, the focus should next be on the courses with the highest student enrollment. The district plan should strive for comparability and consistency among teachers across subjects and grade levels regarding the total number of required student learning objectives.

## Standards and Content

**Q: Should student learning objectives be aligned primarily to course curriculum or Common Core State Standards?**

**A:** Align student learning objectives in the following order:

1. Common Core State Standards
2. Ohio Academic Content Standards
3. National standards put forth by education organizations

**Q: Can I list the standards in the Standards and Content section or do I need to write a narrative?**

**A:** You can list the standards in this section, but you also need to articulate the content of the standards. For example, simply listing “CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4” is not enough information. In this section you will need to explain the core knowledge and skills students must attain and why you identified those standards as the most important.

**Q: Should student learning objectives cover multiple standards or just one?**

**A:** You must have at least one student learning objective that covers the overarching standards that represent the breadth of the course. For example, if the course is a year-long course, the standards and content section must reflect the overarching standards for that year-long course. Once this course-level student learning objective is in place, you may then choose to write a targeted student learning objective, in which you focus on a subgroup of students (the low-achieving, for example) and also narrow the content to only those standards that these students have yet to master.

# Assessment(s)

## Q: What is stretch?

**A:** To have sufficient stretch, an assessment must contain questions that vary in difficulty. The assessment should contain both basic and advanced knowledge and skill questions so that both low-performing and high-performing students can demonstrate growth.

## Q: Is it the intent of the student learning objective process to use the same instrument for pre-assessment and post-assessment to accurately measure student growth?

Using the same instrument as a pre- and post-assessment is not ideal. In fact, using the same assessment multiple times within the same year may decrease the validity of results since students will have seen the questions before. A well-written pre-assessment (used in conjunction with other forms of baseline data) can be a valuable source of data, because it should closely align with the post-assessment to measure growth. Pre-assessments should assess the same general content as the post-assessment, be comparable in rigor, and should be reviewed by content experts for validity and reliability.

## Q: What types of assessments can be used with student learning objectives?

**A:**

- District-approved, locally developed assessments
- Pre/Post assessments
- Performance-based assessments
- Portfolios
- Vendor assessments not on the ODE approved list

## Q: Should all modifications for students with disabilities be included in this section?

**A:** The Student Learning Objective Template Checklist does not specify that modifications must be listed in the assessment section. However, articulating that modifications are being provided to your students in accordance with their IEPs is an important fact as it demonstrates knowledge of your students.

## Q: Do teachers grade the assessments?

**A:** This is a local decision. It might be useful to consider grading tests in teams so you are grading your colleagues' students, not your own students. Collaborative grading is used in many schools with established student learning objectives. Your district may wish to address this issue in the local Student Growth Measures Plan.

## Q: How do I know that my teacher-designed assessments are valid and reliable?

**A:** It is certainly more challenging to determine if a teacher-designed assessment is valid and reliable. However, districts can put procedures in place to help increase assessment validity and reliability. Using the checklist provided by the Department in the *Guidance on Selecting Assessments for Student Learning Objectives* is a good first step. In addition, having content and assessment experts from the district or the local Educational Service Center review the assessments can help ensure that tests capture the information needed about student performance and are fair to all students. Standardized scoring procedures can also increase a test's validity and reliability.

**Q: Can I create the assessment for my student learning objective?**

**A:** The Department strongly advises against an individual teacher creating an assessment. In rare cases where a team of teachers cannot create an assessment, you should develop the assessment in conjunction with an instructional coach, curriculum supervisor, special education teacher, English Language Learner teacher, and administrator or other faculty member with assessment expertise.

**Q: Can I use my quarterly assessments or my mid-term exam as part of my post-assessment?**

**A:** This is not acceptable as it would not meet the requirement for demonstrating growth between **two** points in time. If the student learning objective content covers an entire semester or year, the pre- and post-assessment should also cover the same content for the entire semester or year. Using quarterly assessments would only assess the content for the quarter. Since the student learning objective covers much more content than a quarter, it is not acceptable to use these assessments as pre and post-assessments. These assessments would simply be used as formative checks for you to determine whether your students are making appropriate progress toward their established growth targets at the end of the course. You can modify various questions from each of these assessments to create an overall pre- and post-assessment that would indeed measure the content for the entire course.

**Q: What if the pre-assessment used in the submitted student learning objective is not very strong?**

**A:** This is a learning process. Evaluators can suggest how to improve the pre-assessment for next year. The goal is to learn from the process in these early years. Districts and schools should have clear expectations regarding assessments to ensure quality pre- and post-assessments.

## Growth Targets

**Q: Will all growth targets be tiered?**

**A:** Instances may exist where one growth target may be acceptable for all students, but this is rare. For example, you may have a small course, such as an honors seminar, in which students start the year with similar background knowledge and skill sets. In this situation, one growth target for all students may be appropriate. The Department recommends setting tiered growth targets to ensure you are addressing the needs of both the high- and low-performing students. Ultimately, every student will have a target within the established tiers.

**Q: If a student is well below proficiency level, is it appropriate to set a growth target of proficiency?**

**A:** Targets should first be developmentally appropriate and then rigorous and attainable. Expecting a student to grow from below basic to proficient in one year may be very difficult. However, in some cases, more than a year's worth of growth is necessary to close the achievement gap. The student learning objective process asks you to set high expectations for students and to establish these targets based upon the analysis of baseline data. You should consult with colleagues, curriculum directors, administrators, and instructional coaches when determining appropriate growth targets.

**Q: At what point can a teacher revise his or her growth targets?**

**A:** In most cases, you cannot revise growth targets once the student learning objective has been approved. If students are showing greater than expected progress, the teacher can extend the assessment to more fully capture the extent of student growth. However, the growth targets do not change. Similarly, if a student is not making sufficient progress toward his or her growth target, you can alter or supplement the instructional strategies. But, again, the growth target

does not change. In some extenuating circumstances, such as after a natural disaster, outbreak of serious illness, or an unplanned extended absence, you may be able to revise your student learning objective with district approval.

**Q: How will the Ohio Department of Education and districts ensure that growth targets are rigorous across schools?**

**A:** The review and approval process helps ensure rigor and comparability at the local level. The Department recommends those approving student learning objectives complete a calibration process to ensure all team members are upholding rigorous standards for every student learning objective within the district. The state will monitor the implementation of student learning objectives by conducting random audits.

## Rationale for Growth Targets

**Q: I feel like I am repeating a lot of information when I attempt to complete the Rationale for Growth Targets section. Am I doing this wrong?**

**A:** Rationales must include strong justifications for why the growth targets are appropriate and achievable for the student population, and, therefore, must be based on student data and the content of the student learning objective. The rationale ties everything together, and, as a result, it touches on every component that came before it. Rationales explain why this learning is important by making connections to school and district goals.

## Student Growth Measures- General Information

**Q: I need more information on student growth measures. Where do I find that information?**

**A:** Here is a [link](#) for an overview of student growth measures, the Department approved list of assessments, student learning objectives information and tools, and steps for designing local student growth measures plans for evaluation. Information is added to the website regularly.

## Business Rules for Student Growth Measures

**Q: I need more information on the Business Rules for Student Growth Measures. Where do I find that information?**

The *Business Rules for Student Growth Measures* addresses technical questions about Student Growth Measures, including those regarding teachers with highly mobile student populations or extremely high or low numbers of students. Districts and schools should assume all teachers included in the new evaluation system, per state law, will have growth measures unless these business rules state otherwise. Click [here](#) to visit the business rules.