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What are the impacts of setting student learning objectives on classroom instruction and student achievement?

Jessica Plaza

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WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF SETTING STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES ON CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Jessica M. Plaza
Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National Louis University
June 30, 2020
WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF SETTING STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES ON CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Dissertation Hearing

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the National College of Education
National Louis University

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

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May 7, 2020
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Abstract

Student learning objectives have emerged as a tool to not only measure student growth, but also as a tool to assess an educator’s impact on student learning. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine what, if any, impact student learning objectives have on an educator's instructional planning and delivery, and then create a change plan that addressed the strengths and needs of the educators involved in order to further support growth in utilizing student learning objectives to positively impact student learning.

This research utilized a mixed methods approach to this inquiry. There was analysis of educator reflections submitted as part of their evaluation process related to student learning objectives. Additionally, a review of the student achievement data connected to the established student learning objectives. Finally, surveys and interviews were conducted with educators at Red Elementary to gain insight into their perspectives on student learning objectives and how student learning objectives may impact the educators professional practice. Results indicate that educators utilize student learning outcomes to plan instruction through the duration of the student learning objective timeline, but do not then plan for next steps or create additional learning goals to continue to support learning around the established goals.
Preface

Heifetz, Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky (2009) stated the “practice of leadership involves two core processes: diagnosis first and then action” (p. 6). Heifetz et al. goes on to share, “To lead effectively, you also have to examine and take action toward yourself in the context of the challenge” (p. 6). My position as an administrator has been a critical component to the work I am doing. I view my primary responsibility as an administrator to provide instructional support to my educators in order to positively impact student achievement. Student learning objectives—essentially, measurable goals for student achievement—are a required component of the teacher evaluation system. I meet with my educators a minimum of four times a year to plan and review their student learning objectives. During these meetings, I came to the realization that the instructional impact that student learning objectives has is something that can be leveraged to have a greater impact on student learning by improving instructional planning and delivery.

Within the context of this study, I was able to diagnose what edges of growth are available at Red Elementary, determine why these edges of growth exist, and create an action plan that can allow more maximized impact on student learning.

Throughout this study, I was also able to reflect on the actions I have taken in the past and determine actions I can take in the future to support student learning objectives being utilized as a tool to support student achievement and not just used as a compliance activity completed as a part of the teacher evaluation system.

As a leader within the study school district, I have endeavored to revise practices and systems that better support a process of planning, implementation, reflection, and
analysis on a regular basis that move student learning objectives out of a compliance space and into a best practice for all educators to utilize.
Acknowledgements

This journey saw me through many ups and downs in life and has shown me that I can truly accomplish anything I set my mind to with the support of amazing people in my life.

Thank you, Dr. Sandra Springer and Dr. Harrington Gibson for agreeing to be my dissertation committee. I know this has been a long journey together, and I appreciate your feedback, confidence, and guidance to help me accomplish this goal. I respect both of you immensely and am lucky to have been able to share my journey with both of you.

My gratitude is extended to the faculty of the Ed.D. program at National Louis University. It was a pleasure to work and learn with each faculty instructor. I gained insight, connections, and support that allowed me to grow personally and professionally.

Thank you, Lynn Martin. I was lucky enough to work with you as my APA editor and truly appreciate the time and effort you devoted to my dissertation.
Dedication

This has been an intense journey, one filled with personal and professional growth, that I would not have been able to accomplish without some essential people in my life.

To Brynn and Grayson you helped to motivate me and cheer me on when I was not sure I could keep going. I hope that I have been able to show you that focus, perseverance, and drive can help you accomplish anything you put your mind to. Mike you put this dream in my head, and I would not have gone for it without you. Thank you for pushing me to always reach for the sky.

To my mom and Rick, thank you for always being there for me and pushing me when I doubted myself. Your faith in my ability to pull through and come out on top has been a cornerstone for me and I would not have made it without your no-nonsense pep talks to keep working.

To my friends that have become my family, thank you for checking in on me, reminding me to buckle down, and letting me take up your space at times to get my work done. The push to work hard, focus, and accomplish this tremendous goal helped me more than you know!
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

District ES is located along the western side of Lake Michigan and just north of Chicago. It is a pre-K–8th grade public school district serving more than 8,000 students. District ES’s 2019 mission statement is, “Working together as a community, we will inspire creativity and prepare each student to achieve academically, grow personally, and contribute positively to a global society. Every Child, Every Day, Whatever it Takes” (Anonymous District ES, 2019).

The district represents a variety of racial, economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds that allows it to create rich learning opportunities focused around inclusivity and equity. There are over 1,400 educators, administrators, and support staff members who have made their professional home at District ES and are dedicated to helping every child reach their full potential. District ES is comprised of 10 attendance-area elementary schools serving Grades K–5, 3 attendance-area middle schools serving Grades 6–8, 2 magnet schools serving Grades K–8, an early childhood center, a school for students with significant special needs, and a therapeutic day school. Within each of the schools, there are individual programs that allow students from a variety of backgrounds to receive support and experience success. These programs range from Two-Way Immersion experiences in English and Spanish, to the African-Centered Curriculum.

For this research, I focused on one elementary school within District ES: Red Elementary. Serving students in the district for the last 112 years, this elementary school is proud to support not only neighborhood students, but also students from across the district in their Grades K–5 self-contained special education program and students receiving English Language Learning support in Grades K–5. The unique student blend
requires educators to have familiarity with supporting students from different cultures, learning needs, and schooling experiences. The educators involved in this research have an average of 10 years teaching experience. Each of these educators are highly qualified and are guided by their belief that all students can learn. As a school, Red Elementary is not only focused on high-quality teaching and learning, which is critically important, but also recognizes the need to focus on the whole child. In addition, Red Elementary is committed to social-emotional learning and fostering a safe and supportive school climate. A core guiding principle of District ES and Red Elementary is recognizing that excellence requires a commitment to equity and a deep engagement in working to promote equitable outcomes for all students. This commitment is evident in the work that educators do each day, as well as in the partnerships that the district and community organizations have with each other. It is in this environment that I have embarked upon my quest to find out more about how educator’s utilize student learning objectives (SLOs) to plan and implement their instruction and the ultimate impact it has on student learning.

In my work as an educator and administrator, it is critically important to create conditions that improve opportunities for student success. The New Teacher Project (2018) released, *The Opportunity Myth*, which shared some startling facts about student achievement. This study found that while more and more students are enrolling for college, once students get there, almost half have to enroll in remedial classes, which are focused on skills and learning they were told they had mastered in high school. The study went on to uncover that, “Students spend most of their time in school without access to four key resources: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement,
and teachers who hold high expectations” (The New Teacher Project, 2018, p. 4). As I reflect on my responsibility as an elementary administrator and educator, I recognized that an area that has a powerful opportunity to address these gaps of access and expectations is looking into the SLO that we create to support student achievement. Linda Suskie (2018) shared that learning outcomes are, “. . . goals that describe what students will be able to do as a result of a learning experience” (p. 41). Anonymous District ES (2019) defines SLOs as, “A way to measure students’ learning growth in direct relation to teachers’ instructional efforts” (p. 2) Establishing learning outcomes or goals are a path for educators to describe what students are able to do and then the SLO is able to measure the success students are having in relation to the educator’s instructional planning and implementation.

While exploring how educators at Red Elementary create SLOs to guide their instructional planning and implementation, it is critical to be continually reflective and identify ways in which to engage students in their learning, hold high expectations for success, and regularly provide grade appropriate work through strong instructional practices. The educators at Red Elementary provide a snapshot of the strengths and edges of growth that may be recognized in each of us as we learn more about how they utilize SLOs to support student learning in their spaces.

**Purpose**

Research shows that educators are the most impactful, “. . . school-based factor affecting student achievement” (Lacireno-Paquet, Morgan, & Mello. 2014, p. 1). As an administrator, I believe it is critical for me to support the teachers I supervise in their ability to create high quality learning goals for their students—focusing on instructional
areas of greatest need to impact academic success for our children. Research by Heather Camp (2017), shared the following findings,

... Teachers’ goals may impact their professional growth and instructional effectiveness. A teacher’s goal orientation appears to impact their likelihood of seeking help in the face of teaching challenges, effort at creating classroom environments that emphasize growth over competition, commitment to serving as a socio-emotional support for students and resistance to teacher burnout. (p. 61)

Knowing that the goals created have a lasting and important impact on several factors within the dance we call education, it is important that I dig further into how educators are creating goals for students, how they are progress-monitoring those goals, and determine if there are patterns of success that can be replicated to positively impact more students’ academic success. The goals that teachers create for their students requires teachers to have a clear understanding of each student’s current level of mastery on any given skill, creating learning opportunities that support student growth, and then assessing and reflecting on student achievement during and at the end of each unit or area of study.

This research has been crucial to my development as a leader. I have learned more about edges of growth for educators—in terms of writing, planning for, and implementing student learning outcome goals, and how to support educators with their personal reflections and planning of next steps. This research has been invaluable for guiding discussions with educators about the goals created for the students. It has provided the opportunity to learn more around goal setting; theories of action and steps to
take when establishing goals; and has allowed for more focus on the intentional planning, implementation, and reflection around the student learning outcomes set for students.

In addition to the importance of creating targeted goals and outcomes for students, it is important to note that all educators throughout District ES are required to create a minimum of two SLOs throughout the school year for targeted groups of students as the student growth component of their formal evaluation. Student learning objectives account for 30 percent of a teacher's final formal evaluation rating. District ES has a formal process for establishing SLOs, which allows me to support my teachers with creating targeted academic goals, planning rigorous instruction, and guiding discussions focused around student achievement data that will impact their learning. While the district utilizes the teacher’s SLOs as part of their evaluation, for the purpose of this research, I am looking at the impact that SLOs have on a teacher’s instructional planning and delivery, not at the impact on a teacher’s summative evaluation rating. The purpose of this evaluation is to dig more into how student learning outcomes are used by educators during their daily instructional planning and delivery. Ultimately the evaluation findings will impact a policy change proposal related to how SLOs are utilized for the teacher evaluation system, as well as how administrators support educators with their SLO design, instructional planning, and instructional delivery.

**Rationale**

In September of 2010, then Governor of Illinois, Pat Quinn, signed the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). The PERA required changes with how both educators and administrators are evaluated in the state of Illinois, focusing not only on professional skills but also student growth measures. With this new law, districts
across the state had to redesign their evaluation systems. The response District ES had to this change was to develop a system of utilizing SLOs to measure student growth for every educator and administrator in the district. As an educator, my focus has been on setting achievable goals for the students I work with; this holds true in my current role as a school leader as well. During my time as a principal in District ES, I have seen varying degrees of understanding about the impact of SLO on teacher instructional planning and delivery, as well as a sense of compliance for the completion of the SLOs versus a commitment to utilizing it as a tool for student achievement.

Student learning objectives provide educators with the opportunity to set goals for targeted groups of students—determining what areas of growth the students may need to support and create a timeline for progress monitoring of the goals that are set. Evaluating the impact of SLOs on teacher’s instructional planning and delivery is directly connected to District ES’s commitment to equity and its engagement in working to promote equitable outcomes for all students. It is necessary to gain a clearer understanding of the impact on student learning outcomes as an administrator and to share that learning with educators throughout the district in order to determine the best ways to provide equitable instructional experiences for the most underserved students.

Additionally, it is critically important to address The New Teacher Project (2018) findings in the report, *The Opportunity Myth*, which uncovered the rate in which students are struggling when they arrive at college. If the purpose of educators is in preparing students to “achieve academically, grow personally, and contribute positively to a global society,” as the 2019 District ES mission statement states, then it is their responsibility to determine how to create learning objectives, plan instruction, and support students with
their learning from the very beginning of their educational experience until they leave (Anonymous District ES, 2019).

Educators who took part in this research reflect the variety of educators and roles that are played throughout the district. General Education teachers from Grades K–5, as well as Special Education and Fine Arts teachers, participated in this study. All educators that support students’ learning are critically important. Educators must look at students through a multifaceted lens that acknowledges their strengths, background knowledge, and what they have to offer to the learning experience—it is critical to capitalize on this same expertise of our educators. The variety of teaching experience, grade level knowledge, instructional practices, and instructional skill have allowed me to have a clearer understanding of the importance of SLO, and their impact on student achievement and instructional practice.

*Figure 1. District ES SLO Process*

**Steps in the SLO Process: Teacher and Evaluator Collaboration**

a. **SLO Approval**: The creation (teacher) and approval (evaluator) of the SLO and its component parts, including identification of learning objective, growth target, and assessment(s) used
   
   i. Guiding questions for the SLO approval process are included in the approval template included in the appendix of this handbook
   
   ii. Steps that can be taken to help increase the likelihood of approval are:

b. **SLO Revision**: The process by which parts or all of the initially approved SLO can be revised and reviewed

c. **SLO Scoring**: The assigning of a singular performance rating to the SLO
Goals

Ding and Sherman (2006) stated that in recent years “. . . research has reported a direct relationship between the quality of teaching and student learning, indicating that teachers have a significant impact on student learning” (p. 41). During my time as an administrator, I have wondered how goal setting impacts educators. What are the tools that educators need to create goals that impact student learning outcomes? How do I support educators in creating, implementing, progress monitoring, and reflecting on goals that will have the greatest impact on student learning? Are the objectives created for students impactful to their learning? How do we know? These are the questions guiding this research and which have helped me to create goals for this work. Specifically:

1. Determine what, if any, impact establishing SLOs has on a teacher’s instructional planning.
2. Determine what, if any, impact SLOs has on a teacher’s instructional delivery.
3. Identify characteristics of educators who are able to support student success in relation to their targeted SLO.

The three goals for this program evaluation are directly connected to the planning and delivery of instruction that is targeted toward accomplishing goals that educators have set for their students. Regardless of the grade level and content area of instructional focus, these goals allowed me to investigate more clearly how each educator utilizes student learning outcomes in their work.

Research Questions

The primary question this research is framed around is:
1. What are the impacts of setting SLOs on classroom instruction and student achievement?

Directly connected to this question are the following:

2. How do teachers utilize the SLO process to plan for instruction?

3. Are there identifiable characteristics for teachers whose students are successful in accomplishing the established student learning outcome?

These questions are directly tied to growing students academically, as well as being more reflective and informed as an educator.

Utilizing these questions align with the goals of the research itself and offer an opportunity to dig deeper into the work that educators are doing, in terms of accomplishing their SLOs. For me, it has proved important to connect the work that educators are doing to measurable outcomes in order to support student academic success and support educators through the process of establishing goals, creating actionable plans of accomplishing those goals, and supporting progress monitoring and analysis of the success of the goals created. Being able to determine the characteristics of educators that are able to create rigorous, achievable goals is necessary so that I can support the implementation and practice for all educators and in turn, their students.

**Conclusion**

The New Teacher Project (2018) study found, “When students who started the year behind grade level had access to stronger instruction, for example, they closed gaps with their peers by 6 months; in classrooms with more grade-appropriate assignments, those gaps closed by more than seven months” (p. 5). Through this journey, I fully explore SLOs—determining if creating targeted goals impact an educators instructional
practice and identifying next edges of growth that can support more impactful educational opportunities for all students. Student learning objectives are a way to measure student achievement through a targeted approach of assessment, instructional planning, progress monitoring, and data analysis. This entire process is necessary to ensure the work educators are asking students to complete in the classroom is being reviewed. Am I providing grade-level appropriate work? Am I, as an educator, holding high expectations for the students that are sitting in front of me? Are my expectations different for the group I am targeting in the SLO? How am I supporting the learning of students using formative assessments that guides my instructional planning and delivery? Educators utilize CCSS to guide their instruction. The CCSS were developed in 2009 and according to an Illinois State Board of Education 2013 fact sheet (Illinois State Board of Education; 2010), adopted in 2010. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2019) state that the purpose of these standards is to:

... establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade. The standards were drafted by experts and teachers from across the country and are designed to ensure students are prepared for today’s entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. The Common Core focuses on developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students will need to be successful. (paras. 1 and 2)

Student learning objectives are created and centered around the established CCSS of learning for the grade level at which the educator is supporting students. These objectives are goals that educators have created for targeted populations of students that are aimed
to positively impact student achievement. These goals are established with a clear criteria outlined by District ES and detailed in Appendix A. The impact of SLOs on student achievement is long lasting and supports student learning throughout their experiences in the educational setting. It is necessary to more fully explore what SLOs are, develop best practices for creating and monitoring them, and determine the impact that SLOs have on instructional planning and delivery. It is time to move beyond SLOs being merely a component of the educator evaluation system and elevate its importance as a tool that supports student learning for all students.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Looking more deeply into SLOs requires diving into several different aspects. Acknowledging that SLOs are utilized as a portion of an educators evaluation process and account for 30 percent of their evaluation rating is important. Having a deeper understanding of why SLOs have been incorporated into the teacher evaluation process and the evaluation process itself is necessary to understanding the context, conditions, culture, and competencies of educators at Red Elementary. Another important aspect to review is goal achievement theory and how personal motivations and beliefs impact the creation and accomplishment of goals, which goes for both educators and students. Finally, the theory of the instructional core must be fully investigated to understand the interconnectedness of the teacher, the student, and the content. These components are all critically important to having a deeper understanding of the impact SLOs have on student achievement.

Teacher Evaluation State Guidelines

For years, teacher evaluation has been something that is studied, looking for best practices to allow for meaningful feedback, measurement of teacher impact and effectiveness, and creating an objective system that evaluates all educators with the same tools and lens. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (2016) guidebook titled, Implementing the Student Growth Component in Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems, in 2010, then Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed into effect the PERA, which made changes to how teachers and administrators performance were measured. With this new act, educators throughout Illinois became responsible for meeting student growth metrics to address their
instructional impact on student learning while still including a portion of the evaluation system to be focused around professional practices. The PERA outlined different ways to utilize student growth measurements for teacher evaluation. In turn, each school district was required to establish the process in which educators and administrators used student growth data to measure their impact on learning growth, as well as evaluate educator’s professional practice.

When Quinn signed PERA into law, the ISBE appointed a Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (2016) that created a guidebook for school districts implementing the student growth component into evaluations. In the guidebook, it was shared, “. . . that SLOs are the best available option for encouraging teacher collaboration while measuring student growth through a reliable and fair process” (Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, 2016, p. 3). As districts throughout Illinois began revising their evaluation systems, Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (2016) offered guidelines to creating policies in each district for the utilization of student growth measures. Anonymous District ES (2019) stated the “. . . SLO process is a way for teachers to set measurable goals for their students, based on each student’s baseline level of performance, content to be learned and students’ projected gains over a defined instructional period” (p. 2). The exact process for District ES can be found in Appendix C. Following this process allows for a consistent way for all educators to create student learning outcomes focused around the targeted needs of instruction for groups of students, as well as create a systematized format for the planning, implementation, and reflection of the SLO.
Student learning objectives emerged as a way to measure the impact of educators on student learning (Lacireno-Paquet et al., 2014, p. 1). Research by Lacireno-Paquet et al. (2014) shared three distinct types of SLOs that can be created:

1. Student learning objectives for individual teachers.
2. Student learning objectives for teams of teachers or grade levels.
3. Schoolwide SLOs, which apply to all educators in the school. (p. 3)

Each of these SLOs offer the opportunity to measure the impact of educators on student learning, create a clear focus as to what is being assessed, and allow for clarity around the learning targets for students—which is connected to instructional planning and delivery by the educator. District ES specifically mandated that 30 percent of an educator’s evaluation is based upon SLOs and the remaining 70 percent is based on professional practices utilizing a framework created by Charlotte Danielson (1996).

**Teacher Evaluation Framework**

Danielson (1996) shared that the framework for teaching that she helped to create identified “. . . those aspects of a teacher’s responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting student learning” (p. 1).

This framework is organized into four different domains:

- Domain 1: Planning and Preparation
- Domain 2: Classroom Environment
- Domain 3: Instruction
- Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities
The complexity of teaching is captured within these four domains. Of particular interest to this study is the connection between Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) and Domain 3 (Instruction) and the creation of student learning outcomes.

Danielson (1996) stated that Domain 1 describes, “how a teacher organizes the content that the students are to learn” (p. 26). Domain 1 requires a deep familiarity with the content and pedagogy of teaching, as well as designing coherent instruction and assessment to have a true understanding of what is being taught, how to teach it, how to measure success, and how to adapt instruction to the needs of students. Danielson (1996) further explained that, “All elements of the instructional design must be appropriate to both the content and the students, and aligned with the larger instructional goals” (p. 27). When thinking about larger instructional goals, it is necessary to connect the content to the CCSS. According to Common Core State Standards Initiative (2019) these standards, “establish clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English Language Arts (ELA) from kindergarten through 12th grade” (paras. 1 and 2). When connecting Domain 1 to SLOs, it is necessary to dig into component 1f of Domain 1, which is Designing Student Assessments. Danielson (1996) stated that assessments in teaching serve two purposes:

1. “To determine that students have in fact achieved the instructional outcomes established through the planning process” (Danielson, 1996, p. 59).

2. “Teachers can design assessments that provide both the teacher and their students with information to guide future learning” (Danielson, 1996, p. 59).

Student learning objectives are a measure of the learning; they are used to determine if the students have achieved the instructional outcomes that teachers planned for when
creating the SLO. To support the instructional outcomes and the assessments of learning, it is necessary to explore Domain 3 of Danielson’s (1996) framework, Instruction.

Danielson (1996) explained that Domain 3 contains the parts that are essential to the core of teaching—“the actual engagement of students in content” (p. 29). This is the actual implementation of the planning and preparation that occurred as part of Domain 1. When looking at Domain 3 though the lens of SLOs, it is important to consider the different components of Domain 3, which Danielson (1996) identifies as the following:

1. Communicating with students.
2. Using questioning and discussion techniques.
3. Engaging students in learning.
5. Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness. (p. 29)

Of particular interest when considering the SLOs that educators have established and Domain 3, it is important to think about how educators are using assessments for learning to help guide instruction and how students are engaged in the learning related to the established SLO. Danielson (1996) stated that assessments have been shifted from signaling only the end of instruction, but has become, “incorporated as an integral part of the instruction” (p. 86). Throughout the educational experience, educators are monitoring student learning and making adjustments to the instruction that was planned as part of Domain 1. Engaging students in their learning is how students learn the complex content presented to them. Danielson (1996) stated that the rest of the Framework for Teaching is in service to student engagement (p. 82). Student engagement is the result of planning and preparation, and must be highly structured, supportive of student learning, and
focused on grade level appropriate standards. District ES utilizes Danielson’s (1996) Framework for Teaching for teacher evaluations, making up 70 percent of the overall evaluation score.

**Student Learning Objectives**

In their study, *Student Learning Objectives: Benefits, Challenges and Solutions*, Lachlan-Haché, Cushing, and Bivona (2012) conveyed several benefits regarding SLOs; most notably: that SLOs, “...reinforce best teaching practices. Setting goals for students, using data to assess progress, and adjusting instruction based on that progress demonstrate good teaching practices” (p. 1) and SLOs “...are adaptable because all educators can demonstrate their impact on student learning because SLOs are not dependent only on standardized assessment scores” (p. 1).

When connecting these benefits to Danielson’s (2016) Framework for Teaching, within Domain 1: Planning and Preparation, educators need to not only be aware of content and pedagogy, but they need to have knowledge of their students, plan coherent instruction and assessment, and have clear learning outcomes planned for their lessons. By having a specific student learning outcome planned for targeted groups of students, educators are able to better focus their planning on the needs of the students in front of them and create and implement educational opportunities focused around addressing areas of need and capitalizing on the strengths of the learners in their care. This is also connected to Domain 3: Instruction, in that this entire domain is focused around what the actual instructional implementation looks like. How is the educator communicating learning expectations to the students? Are students engaged in the learning? Are there differentiated supports and pathways for learners to accomplish targeted goals? What
types of questions are being asked of the students by the educator and their peers? How is the educator assessing student learning? All of these components are essential for planning and implementing instruction focused around a SLO. The next step involves exploring the overall best practices of an educator evaluation system.

**Best Practices of an Educator Evaluation System**

Robert J. Marzano (2012) suggested that when considering teacher evaluation systems, one must acknowledge that, “. . . measuring teachers and developing teachers are different purposes” (p. 15). In Marzano’s article, *Teacher Evaluation* (2012), he shared that of more than 3,000 educators surveyed, “. . . seventy-six percent shared that they believe the measurement and development should be the dual purpose of evaluation, but that development should be dominant” (p. 15). Marzano (2012) goes on to share that an evaluation system focused on growth and development has three main characteristics:

1. The system is comprehensive and specific. By comprehensive, Marzano (2012) stated the “model includes all elements that research has identified as associated with student achievement. Specific identifies classroom strategies and behaviors at a granular level” (p. 16).

2. The system includes a “developmental scale or rubric that teachers can use to guide and track their own skill development” (Marzano, 2012, p. 18).

3. The system “. . . acknowledges and rewards teacher growth” (Marzano, 2012, p. 18).

These distinctions are important to consider when thinking about how PERA has impacted the teacher evaluation process in Illinois. With the adoption of the Danielson (2016) Framework for Teaching, as well as incorporating SLOs, District ES has created a
system focused on both student achievement as well as building teacher practice, and allows for educators to track their own development both through Danielson’s rubric and the work of SLOs.

In his article, *Effective Teacher Evaluation Systems*, Thomas McGreal (1982) noted that in “systems that function effectively, a recurring commonality is some form of goal setting between the teacher and the supervisor. The goal-setting process is a cooperative activity” (p. 304). Anonymous District ES (2019) defined SLOs as, “. . . a way to measure students’ learning growth in direct relation to teachers’ instructional efforts” (p. 2). Student learning objectives are goals that have been created by educators for student learning and meant to guide instructional planning, implementation, and planning. Regardless of the steps each district requires an educator to follow, SLOs are goals set by an educator with input and feedback from administration. McGreal (1982) stated, “Extensive contact between a supervisor and teacher over the course of a year in a well-developed goal setting system is much more effective in altering classroom behavior than the perfunctory, yearly visits that characterizes most local evaluation systems” (p. 305). This supports the need for revising the teacher evaluation system that occurred with the passing of PERA in 2010. It is important to dig more into the process of goal setting and the impacts it has on student achievement.

**Goal Setting and Student Achievement**

Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (2002) are leading researchers in the field of goal setting theory. The center of this theory states, “. . . setting specific, difficult goals produces stronger outcomes than setting easy or medium goals . . .” (p. 714). Camp
(2017) shared research from Locke and Latham attributing the effectiveness of goals to four components:

1. Goals have a directive effect. “They direct attention and effort toward goal relevant activities” (Camp, 2017, p. 62).
2. Goals have an energizing effect. “Effort is mobilized and expended in proportion to the difficulty level of the goal” (Camp, 2017, p. 62).
3. Goals have a persistence effect. “We work longer at the task than we otherwise would” (Camp, 2017, p. 62).

Connecting these components to goal setting for educators—when an educator and administrator collaborate to create an SLO focused on student learning—the goals promote a sense of focus, persistence to accomplish the goal, and promote problem solving to support the students learning. In, *Helping Teachers Set Goals*, Thomas L. McGreal (1980) shared, “. . . if instructional improvements and teacher growth . . . are the primary purposes of setting goals, then the number of goals is less important that the quality of the goal or goals that are set” (p. 415). This then leads to how these goals are established, monitored and analyzed.

In *Goal Setting for Students and Teachers: Six Steps to Success*, Laura Rader (2005) shared that as a teacher, “. . . having a clear sense of goals and the reasons behind them is critical to providing successful instruction. It allows the teacher’s day-to-day instruction to take more direction and meaning” (p. 124). So how are these goals established in order to impact instruction and student achievement? Research by
Hornyak, Lawlor, and Snyder (2012) shared the history of goals, dating back to the time of Aristotle and Plato to present day. Throughout their research, they found a set of processes one would follow to create goals—starting with being specific and measurable, as well as relevant and realistic. The term SMART goals has organically developed over time, but includes the following requirements:

1. Specific—What exactly is the goal targeting?
2. Measurable—How will this goal be measured for success?
3. Attainable—Can this goal be accomplished?
4. Realistic—Is the goal doable?
5. Timely—What is the timeframe in which this goal will be accomplished?

Using this as a guideline, goals can be clearly created and planned for using specificity, timeliness, and a focus on measuring the success of the goal. Hamilton et al. (2009) suggested using data “systematically to ask questions and obtain insight about student progress is a logical way to monitor continuous improvement and tailor instruction to the needs of each student” (p. 5). As District ES laid out in their SLO process, data needs to be at the center of determining the student learning outcome, the targeted population, the established goal for the student group, the progress monitoring of success, and ultimately, the evaluation of the SLO’s success in terms of student achievement. This process is what Paul Bambrick discussed in, Driven by Data: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction (2010), and is illustrated in Figure 2.
The continuous cycle shown in Figure 1 is what student learning outcomes require an educator to follow. First it is necessary to collect the data, or work, that students are producing each day. Then, it is necessary to analyze the data and identify an area of need, this can be for the entire class or subgroups of students. Finally it is time to make instructional decisions, plan and implement these decisions and then reflect on the effectiveness. The entire process begins again and continues until the student learning objective that has been established has been accomplished by the targeted population. Data should be collected throughout the process, analyzed, and then the teacher should be making instructional decisions based on what the data is showing for the groups of students within the SLO. Planning should be purposeful and targeted on what the data shows are areas of need or growth for the students. The educator should then reflect on their practice, student data, and begin the cycle again, with the continuous focus being on supporting student achievement of the targeted learning outcome.
Connecting Teaching and Student Learning

Research by Darling-Hammond and Young (2002) showed that the “...effectiveness of teaching has a direct relationship between its quality and student learning” (p. 13), and additional research by Odden, Borman, and Fermanich (2004) showed that teachers have a large impact on student learning. When thinking about creating student learning outcomes, or setting goals for students, it is important to have an understanding of how these goals impact student achievement. Ding and Sherman (2006, pp. 40–51) reported that studies found students make more learning gains when instruction is effectively connected to assessment. But how does student learning and goals connect to instructional planning and delivery?

In, Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning, City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) shared the idea of the instructional core, or “the relationship between the teacher and the student in the presence of content” (p. 22). City et al. (2009) proposed there are only three ways to improve student learning:

1. Increase the level and skills that the teacher brings to the instructional process.
2. Increase the level and complexity of the content that students are asked to learn.
3. Change the role of the student in the instructional process. (p. 24)

These three components are all connected—if one is not happening then there is no improvement in teaching or learning. This distinction is important to pay attention to when considering the types of SLOs that educators develop for their students, the instructional planning and delivery and finally, the responsibilities of the students and
their learning. The instructional core requires a shift in thinking about how all of these components play together to impact student learning. As educators create SLOs, it is necessary to think more about the skills the educator brings to the instructional process, but also to think about what the level of rigor or complexity is with the content that students are being asked to master and to think through the student’s role in their own learning. What skill does the educator bring to the table—in terms of establishing SLOs? What are the expectations for learning and mastery within the SLO and how are educators planning their instruction to address that? How are students engaged in the important task of learning and mastery in partnership with the educator to accomplish the goals that are set? These questions are important and leads to exploring a bit more about the different types of goals.

**Types of Goals**

Ruth Butler (2007) stated two types of goals: mastery or ability. Mastery goals are a way to define and evaluate “. . . competence relative to task demand, . . . attribute outcomes to effort. . . looks at difficulty with a task as a diagnostic of the need for further learning, and seeking help and information that can support learning” (p. 241). Ability goals are more about one defining and evaluating their understanding relative to others, and “. . . attribute outcomes to ability, look at difficulty with the work as low ability by the person” (Butler, 2007, p. 241).

Using these definitions, the SLOs that teachers are creating are focused around mastery goals. Educators are working to create student goals that allow them to measure the competence of a task, attribute the success or struggle to the effort with the work, and utilize these goals to diagnose further learning needs. Anonymous District ES (2019)
defines SLO as a process that creates authentic goal setting, allows progress monitoring, and analyzes student growth in meaningful ways. This process is student centered, differentiated, and growth oriented. Additionally, it focuses on skills mastery that allows for student achievement. It is not focused on looking at ability as the determining measure of success.

Of significance is that while educators are responsible for planning and delivering instruction (as well as for creating SLOs that they will utilize for 30 percent of their evaluation), there needs to be some investigation of the learner and a connection (between the educator and learner) regarding accomplishing the SLOs as a team. While the goal-setting theory focuses on the processes and impacts of the person setting the goals, the achievement goal theory describes motivation in achievement and learning and the impact on cognition and behavior. Research by Dresel, Fasching, Steuer, Nitsche, and Dickhäuser (2013) suggested, “. . . Teacher’s goal orientations influence their instructional practices as well as the motivation and learning behavior of their students” (p. 572). Educators need to be aware of the types of learning goals they are establishing for their students. For example, Dresel et al. (2013) said it is assumed that when a teacher creates a mastery goal, he or she is focused on the learning and mastery of a skill, which in turn makes the student’s responsible for their improvement and understanding of the subject matter (p. 573). When educators are creating goals focused on performance, they focus on the grades and accuracy, which either rewards the high-achieving students or denies lower-achieving student’s success. This argues the fact that when creating mastery goals, which is what student learning outcomes are, the educator is able to plan instruction around the needs of the students sitting in front of them—creating
opportunities for students to access the instruction at their level and create learning spaces where the work is focused on mastering content, not just achieving a grade. Dresel et al. (2013) shared that mastery goals lead to “. . . adaptive motivation and behavior outcomes . . .” (p. 573). At the heart of SLOs is a focus on student success with the mastery goals that have been established.

Conclusion

Goal setting has been a practice that can be traced back to Ancient Greek times. As educators continue to evolve, goal setting has taken on many different shapes and requirements. In today’s educational setting, goal setting is not only used as an evaluative tool, but can be used to create learning opportunities for all students and educators to accomplish mastery level skills. With the adoption of PERA in 2010, Illinois took a more focused approach on goal setting in order to evaluate the impact of educators on student learning. In 2016, the Illinois Board of Education released a guidebook titled, Implementing the Student Growth Component in Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems. The guidebook relayed that student learning outcomes are the best available option for “. . . encouraging teacher collaboration while measuring student growth through a fair and reliable process” (Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, 2016, p. 3).

Utilizing clear processes and procedures for creating student learning outcomes, while also having an understanding of teacher motivation and the impact of their goals on student learning, is essential for creating goals that will positively impact student learning. It is also critically important to have a clear understanding of the type of goals educators are creating for their students and the impact it has on their instructional
planning and delivery. Student learning objectives offer a powerful opportunity for educators to measure student success and teacher effectiveness. There is a direct connection between the goals that are created and the instruction that is delivered in order to support student success with these goals. Student learning outcomes continue to be a vital component of educator planning. The next chapter discusses the work performed to collect and analyze data from educators at Red Elementary to be able to answer the essential research question, *What are the impacts of setting student learning objectives on classroom instruction and student achievement?*
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The way that data is collected is critically important. My research focused on utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data in order better answer my essential research question, What are the impacts of setting student learning objectives on classroom instruction and student achievement?

Research Design Overview

In, Utilization Focused Evaluation, Michael Patton (2008) described program evaluation as something that, “. . . describes and assesses what was intended, what happened that was unintended, what was actually implemented, and what outcomes and results were achieved” (p. 5). I have evaluated the utilization of student learning outcomes set by teachers in District ES. District ES has determined that using SLOs are another way to measure student achievement, directly tied to teacher’s instruction. Data was gather through teacher interviews; analyzing reports that compiled teacher progress with established SLOs; and analyzing data generated through a preassessment, progress monitoring, and postassessment of the established SLO. The goal for this work involves allowing more teacher ownership and accountability of student achievement using local and personal goals for the students in front of them on a daily basis. Patton (2008) described process use as, “something that occurs when those involved in the evaluations learn from the evaluation process itself or make program changes based on the evaluation process rather than just the evaluation’s findings” (p. 156).

I utilized a mixed methods approach while conducting my research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explaining that a mixed methods approach is, “an approach to inquiry involving collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, integrating the two forms of
The core assumption or this form of inquiry is that the integration of the data yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either the quantitative or qualitative data alone” (p. 4). Using a mixed method approach provided clarity in a way that allows the researcher to answer the questions that have arisen through the program evaluation. The first approach was focused around collecting qualitative data via interviews and observations. Once interviews were completed, the data was sorted to determine any underlying themes and relationships between the use of SLOs and how a teacher is planning instruction. In addition, quantitative data was also collected utilizing the TalentEd system, which is used throughout District ES. This analysis allowed for comparisons across the schools regarding the percentage of teachers who were successful in accomplishing their established SLOs.

**Participants**

This research is focused around 17 educators serving students from Grades K–5, as well as special education, instructional interventionists, and the librarian—all teaching at Red Elementary. These teachers have an average of 12 years teaching experience, many of them at Red Elementary for their entire career. An interesting feature for most of the educators involved in this research is that for the entirety of their career, nine of the seventeen educators have only taught the grade level they are currently still teaching. This provides them with the unique insights of what the learners at their grade level are able to do developmentally, as well as have a full grasp of the curriculum at that grade level.

It was critically important for me to work with educators from a variety of roles in order to gain a broader perspective of how student learning outcomes are created,
implemented, and progress monitored. The multiple perspectives the educators were able to provide while conducting this research was invaluable to me as an administrator. I learned more about their unique craft; identified the different traits they rely on to create, implement, and progress monitor; and reflected on the goals established for their students. Doing so provided the opportunity for me to dig a bit more regarding their motivation with the establishment of student learning outcome goals and how this may have impacted their work with the goals they created. All participants were involved in this research voluntarily with the understanding I would investigate their process for creating student learning outcome goals—looking at their planning and implementation process as well as their reflection and student growth outcomes.

**Data Gathering Tools**

The research I conducted was performed through a utilization-focused evaluation lens. The use of my research was focused on how, “... real people in the real world apply the finding and experiences in this process” (Patton, 2008, p. 37). It was crucial I kept in mind how the research could be utilized to apply to an educator’s and administrator’s experience. While conducting the research, I utilized a variety of tools. First, by interviewing teachers to gain a better understanding of how they utilized student learning outcomes in their instructional planning. Second, I used a system called TalentEd to review educator submitted SLOs, data analysis and reflection. Finally, I was able to utilize conversations, reflections, and moments of instructional leadership I previously participated in as my role as administrator. The central questions that guided my focus when collecting data are as follows:
1. What are the impacts of setting student learning objectives on classroom instruction and student achievement?

2. How do teachers utilize the SLO process to plan for instruction?

3. Are there identifiable characteristics for teachers whose students are successful in accomplishing the established student learning outcomes?

**Interviews**

Kvale (1996) regarded interviews as, “an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data” (p. 14). Interviewing the educators allowed the opportunity to dig more into the instructional planning and implementation practices supporting the achievement of their established SLOs. Both myself and the research participants were able to dig deeper into the thought processes behind establishing SLOs, determine the instructional planning and implementation moves an educator took, and reflect together on the impact this had on their practice and student achievement. For those who volunteered to be a part of this process, interviews were scheduled at convenient times. Additionally, interviewees chose the location to have the conversation. Observations in teacher meetings were conducted that focused around classroom instruction and analyzing the progress-monitoring results for the established student learning outcomes. The interview protocol and questions can be found in Appendices D and E.

**TalentEd**

The second tool this research utilized to gather data was a tool called TalentEd. TalentEd is a part of the PowerSchool educational technology software and is online
evaluation software. TalentEd compiles components of the professional practices and SLOs from the teacher evaluation process. According to www.powerschool.com (n.d.), this technology software offers a Grades K–12 system supporting “. . . with clear scoring tools, visibility into evaluation processes, and ongoing dialogue about their effectiveness and areas of improvement” (Keep Teachers Informed and Engaged; https://www.powerschool.com/solutions/unified-talent/teacher-evaluation/).

District ES purchased this software to streamline the evaluation system utilized for all educators in the district. All educators in District ES are required to create two, SLOs that are specific to the needs of the students in their classroom. Using the TalentEd software, educators submit their SLO—including the required components as outlined by District ES (see Appendix A). When reviewing the participants’ completed SLO forms, there SLO analysis provided quantitative data that showed student achievement results tied to the student learning outcome, as well as the educator’s personal reflections about the SLO, its impact on student learning, and its impact on each educator’s instruction.

**Personal Reflection**

As an administrator, I work hard to build-in time to reflect and analyze the impacts of the discussions I have or the decisions I make. I view this as an essential tool to push my own practice forward and it is something I know I need to model for the educators I lead. Calderhead (1992) stated that while reflection can take several forms, there are some basic practices that all reflective educator’s exhibit. These include:

The reflective educator is the one who is able to analyze their own practice and the context in which it occurs and; the reflective educator is expected to be able to
stand back from their own teaching, evaluate the situation and take responsibility for their own future action. (p. 141)

During my own reflection time, I have been able to think clearly about my practice. In this case, it relates to supporting educators with creating, planning instruction, and analyzing their SLOs.

**Ethical Considerations**

Several layers went into conducting this research ethically. The first step was in gaining permission from District ES to evaluate the student learning outcome process completed by all educators and administrators in the district. My research questions were organized so I could identify the parties I planned to collect data from; this was part of the informed consent process that was followed with all participants. According to the 1979 Belmont Report, the informed consent process involves three features:

1. (1) Information or the sharing of specific items for disclosure intended to assure that subjects are given sufficient information about the research. (2) Comprehension or facilitating the understanding of what has been disclosed; and
2. (3) Voluntariness or an agreement to participate in research constitutes a valid consent only if voluntarily given. This element of informed consent requires conditions free of coercion and undue influence. (Ryan et al., 1979, pp. 7–8)

Throughout the program evaluation, a low risk of potential harm exists as the data being collected is looking at standardized testing and is not directly tied to a teacher or student name.
Data Analysis Techniques

How data is reviewed is critically important to understanding what the data is telling us. There are several different ways to analyze data collected, and depending on the type of data additional techniques need to be utilized.

**Quantitative**

To start, grade level and number of SLOs incorporated in this research were reviewed. This was necessary to ensure the ability to have a broad range of experience, knowledge, skill, and students represented in this research. Tables 1 and 2 detail the grade level or role of the educator SLO and the content area focus for the SLOs reviewed through TalentEd, which is the educator software program District ES utilizes for teacher evaluation.

Table 1
*Educator Grade Level/Role and Number of SLOs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level Taught/Role</th>
<th>Number of SLOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventionist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SpEd</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*
Table 2

Number of SLOs by Content Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of SLOs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives

Coding

The second method used to analyze the data collected through interviews and surveys was coding. Responses were coded into different categories to sort and better analyze the participant’s responses. Johnny Saldaña (2015) shared, “Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act. Also be aware that a code can sometimes summarize, distill, or condense data, not simply reduce them” (p. 5). Coding was utilized as a way to interpret the responses collected in both interviews and when reviewing the participant’s submitted SLO forms in TalentEd. Coding allowed the ability to create distinct categories of responses in order to better analyze and sort data related to the research questions. Table 3 shows the identified categories:

Table 3

SLO Reflection Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning for creation of SLO</th>
<th>Impact of SLO process on Ss achievement</th>
<th>Characteristics of instruction related to the SLO</th>
<th>Characteristics of instructional planning related to the SLO</th>
<th>Characteristics of reflection and/or next steps related to the SLO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives
Saldaña (2015) commented that coding, “Leads you from the data to the idea, and from the idea to all the data pertaining to that idea” (p. 8); he also stated, “Coding is not just labeling, it is linking” (p. 8). In other words, coding is a tool that allows researchers to organize and sort data to find trends, patterns, and key ideas. Saldana reinforces coding is a cyclical act. The more cycles of coding one works through “further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts” (p. 8). Hennie Boeije (2010) concurred that multiple cycles help determine, “Which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones . . . [and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). This same process was followed when analyzing the impact of SLOs on student learning. The analysis and reflection forms that educators completed within the reporting system to determine the outcomes for the students were reviewed.

**Qualitative**

Educator rubric scores were used to review the overall rating for each educator in terms of the percentage of students meeting their expected SLO as well as the rating based on the reflection rubric (see Appendix F) for educators connected to their established SLO. This was helpful in comparing what educators had shared through interviews, what they reported in their reflections, and what the student academic data revealed. Tables 4 and 5 detail the SLO evaluation results for each of the SLOs that participants completed. The rubric for the overall rating scale can be found in Appendix G.
Table 4

SLO Ratings for SLO 1 Submitted by Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*

Table 5

SLO Ratings for SLO 2 Submitted by Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Distinguished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*

**Conclusion**

Collecting data for this research took several different forms. Using interviews allowed a deeper perspective and guided conversations with the 17 participants at Red Elementary—specifically around their SLOs. These conversations allowed the opportunity to guide conversations around specific and targeted discussion questions that provided additional insights and understandings of how educators not only viewed SLOs, but also how they created, planned, and implemented instruction related to them, and the student assessment data they were able to collect to measure student growth. Learning more about how teachers utilize student learning outcomes in guiding their instruction
has allowed district leadership, school leadership, and educators to gain a clearer understanding of the impact of student learning outcomes on student achievement.

Using the TalentEd software allowed another level of understanding of the SLO process that each educator followed and their personal reflections about the impact of SLOs on their student growth and instructional practices.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Upon collecting and analyzing my data, it is now time to share what the results are showing us and begin to uncover what the data tells us about the possible impacts of student learning objectives on teacher instructional planning and delivery.

Introduction

Having a clear picture of the current academic data for Red Elementary is important when it comes to student achievement for the school overall. In 2019, Illinois reported student growth and achievement data using the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) for Red Elementary. Overall, Red Elementary has been rated as an Exemplary School, which means that based upon this assessment data, it is performing in the top 10 percent of all schools in the state of Illinois. Student proficiency on both the ELA and Math IAR assessments show the overall student population meeting expectations well above the state average. However, looking at the differences in student achievement based within subgroups of students is significant. On average, 75 percent of Caucasian students are meeting or exceeding expectations on the ELA and Math IAR assessment, while approximately 20 percent of African American students are meeting expectations. Similar results are also apparent when looking at students who identify as low-income or having special education needs. This data provides a glimpse into the academic successes and struggles that students at Red Elementary experience. The data also helps to frame the current academic state of the school.

Utilizing the 4 C’s framework detailed in, Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming our Schools (Wagner et. al., 2006), the context, culture, conditions, and competencies at Red Elementary were explored. Exploring the 4 C’s allowed the
opportunity to determine the As-Is state of Red Elementary connected to the main research question, *What are the impacts of setting SLOs on classroom instruction and student achievement* and the subset of related questions: *How do teachers utilize the SLO process to plan for instruction? Are there identifiable characteristics for teachers whose students are successful in accomplishing the established student learning outcome?*

**Findings**

When looking at the findings of this study, it is important to consider the different components that address different arenas of change. Wagner et al. (2006) offers an “approach to thinking systematically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and districts, which are called the 4 C’s—competency, conditions, culture and context” (p. 98). These four components help focus leaders on what needs to happen to achieve goals throughout the systems that they lead.

**Context**

Wagner et al. (2006) shared that context refers to the “larger organizational systems within which we work and their demands and expectations” (p. 104). The first organizational system recognized as having an impact on the context of this research is the ISBE. Student growth is a component of the teacher evaluation system for all educators throughout Illinois, and it is important to be clear on the expectations set forth by the state in terms of how student growth measures are used as part of the teacher evaluation system. District ES has created an evaluation system that aligns 70 percent of the teacher evaluation with *professional practice* and 30 percent of the teacher evaluation with *student growth*. District ES uses the following rubric in Table 6 for combining professional practice and student growth for final evaluation ratings.
Table 6

*SLO Rating Rubric for Educators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Growth Rating</th>
<th>Professional Practice Rating (70%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unsatisfactory (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLO Rating Rubric for Educators</td>
<td>Needs Improvement (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory (1)</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement (2)</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient (3)</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (4)</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*

Within the context of District ES, it is significant to note that all educators and administrators are evaluated using the rubric in Table 6 to determine final evaluation ratings.

Based upon the recommendations of ISBE when PERA was adopted, District ES developed its own evaluation system. All educators must create two student learning outcome goals each school year. When looking specifically at Red Elementary, based upon the rubrics established by the district, the average overall SLO rating was 3.89 on a 4.00 scale. Data gathered during research showed that 100 percent of educators accomplished the student growth component of their SLO. Table 7 shows the District ES rating scale for determining success based on the percentage of students meeting their SLO goal.
Table 7

*SLO Rating Rubric for Educator Reflection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Students Meeting SLO Goal (70% Weight)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory (0–25% of students meeting SLO goal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement (26–50% of students meeting SLO goal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient (51–75% of students meeting SLO goal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (76–100% of students meeting SLO goal)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*

Of importance to note is that 19 of the 26 SLOs, or 73 percent, were rated as distinguished for the educator reflection and analysis of their student learning outcome.

Figure 2 represents the overall SLO ratings based on the rubric in Table 6 for the educators at Red Elementary.

*Figure 3. Overall SLOs Ratings*

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*
Culture

Wagner et al. (2006) defined culture as the, “Shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). My research centered on exploring the beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors around students and learning and teachers and teaching, as related to student learning outcomes. The data can be sorted into five categories (see Appendix H):

1. Tools and/or resources teacher’s used for planning for the creation of their SLO.
2. Impact of the SLO on student achievement.
3. Characteristics of the planning of instruction supporting the SLO.
4. Characteristics of the instruction supporting the SLO.
5. Characteristics of reflection and/or identified next steps upon the completion of the SLO.

Red Elementary educators have overwhelmingly reported that their SLOs were created through an explicit review of baseline data to guide instruction and determine Ss subgroups for SLO. Additionally, there is a culture of small group, differentiated instruction that is provided to support student success related to the established SLO, as well as use of progress monitoring throughout the timeline to determine next steps (instructionally) to support student learning. In several educator interviews or reflections, it was mentioned that setting student learning outcomes provided them the opportunity to think more deeply about what the students are expected to have mastered, as concerned with the CCSS; doing so helped them to be more aware of the need for regular progress
monitoring and intentional planning that was focused, specific, and targeted at areas of need to support student growth. Out of the 17 educators participating in the research, 15 shared that establishing SLOs had a positive impact on their instructional planning and delivery.

**Conditions**

Wagner et al. (2006) described conditions as the, “Visible arrangements and allocations of time, space, and money” (p. 102). When creating student learning outcomes, a condition that definitely impacts the planning, implementation, and analysis of the process is the timeline and expectations created by District ES, and which all educators at Red Elementary take part in. Part of the evaluation system requires that every educator create two different student learning outcomes to measure student growth. Specifically, educators are required to have one SLO created by mid-October and the second by the end of February. There is flexibility for educators in terms of the length of their SLO, but all SLOs must be completed by May and reviewed with their administrator prior to the end of the school year. The following responses ascertained during the interview phase detail some feedback around the conditions surrounding SLOs.

Educators shared the following:

- “I would like the rigid timelines and the quantities of SLOs to be reduced and applied as an intervention versus required for every staff member every year based on an artificial calendar” (study participant, personal communication, September 25, 2018).
• “Remove the time, paperwork, and meetings that are required and allow the process to be less formal. Teachers only have so much time and energy” (study participant, personal communication, February, 28, 2019).

• “It has slowed down the pacing of my delivery and it has also caused students, small groups, and entire cohorts to miss other key benchmarks/standards due to an over focus on a single skill/standard” (study participant, personal communication, September 25, 2018).

These statements provide evidence that there is difficulty within the conditions that have been created as part of the evaluation system for educators. Connected to these difficulties are pieces of evidence that show educators are not collaborating with other professionals who support the students and are the focus of the student learning outcome.

In fact, collaboration with other educators as a practice for instructional planning was only mentioned four times. Of importance is that upon reflection, there were 11 mentions pertaining to how the educator changes instructional delivery for the coming school year related to the established SLO, but none shared how the educator utilized the student growth for that year to help continue to guide instruction for the remainder of the current year.

Competencies

Wagner et al. (2006) defined competencies as, “The repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 99). Wagner et al (2006) also shared that “competencies are most effectively built when professional development is focused, job-embedded, continuous, constructed and collaborative” (p. 99). To connect this to the data collected in this research, it is important to have a clear picture of how educators use
SLOs to plan and implement their instruction and how they use data to measure student growth. Table 8 organizes the data in terms of how educators are utilizing their SLOs to plan and implement their instruction.

Table 8

*Characteristics of Instruction Related to SLOs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Instruction Related to the SLO</th>
<th>Characteristics of Instructional Planning Related to the SLO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated small group instruction for targeted students</td>
<td>Utilization of progress monitoring to plan next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 25 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 28 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole group instruction related to SLO</td>
<td>Collaborate and plan instruction with additional educational supports (EL, Rdg, Tutors, SpEd) for targeted populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 17 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 4 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilization of Workshop model</td>
<td>Intentionally planned work for students to do at home connected to SLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 10 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused 1:1 support between educator and student</td>
<td>Intentional planning around technology available to support learning related to the SLO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 10 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of purposefully planned activities available to practice the same skill</td>
<td>Intentional incorporation of learning across content areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 5 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure there was dedicated time within instruction focused specifically on targeted SLO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* SLOs = Student Learning Objectives
Overwhelmingly, educators at Red Elementary report the regular use of differentiation in small groups or one-on-one instructional moments focused around the established SLO, as well as progress-monitoring students in order to plan for next steps in terms of instructional needs. Of significance are the few times that targeted collaboration (mentioned four times), connecting practice at home (mentioned three times), the use of technology (mentioned three times), and cross content connections (mentioned three times) were indicated, thereby suggesting that this is where competencies for educators at Red Elementary can be further developed in order to have additional impact on student learning.

When looking at how educators are planning their instruction and comparing it to how they reflect on the activities and progress monitoring of student learning, there is a discrepancy. When planning instruction related to the SLO, educators reported (28 times) that they utilize progress monitoring to plan next steps; however, when reviewing the reflection data, only eight educators reflected on how to progress monitor for learning and using that information for planning. There is a discrepancy between educators sharing that they do actual progress monitoring of learning, but not reflecting on how they progress monitored or how they used that to guide their instruction.

**Interpretation**

Michael Patton (2008) stated that interpretation, “Involves determining the significance of and explanations for the findings” (p. 478). What do these results mean? What can we learn? First, it is important to note glows within the data—the things that show what District ES and Red Elementary are successful with. The data shows the systematized protocol that District ES has established for the creation of SLOs is
followed by the educators at Red Elementary. In both data collected from TalentEd and through interviews, it was mentioned (42 times) that there is an explicit review of baseline data to guide instruction and determine student subgroups for the SLO. Additionally, there is mention (24 times) of the educators reviewing District ES’ prescribed curriculum and assessment to guide instruction. Connected to this is the regular use of CCSS and district academic expectations used in the creation and implementation of the student learning outcomes created. This suggests that District ES’ organizational system has impacted the culture of how student learning is created and supported. Another glow the data showed was that all students accomplished the student learning outcomes established at Red Elementary. Educators also recognized the need for whole group, small group, and one-on-one support for students to experience success in terms of the goals set out in the SLO. While all students met their expected student growth measures, it is necessary to look at areas of growth for educators with student learning outcomes.

While the culture for utilization of student learning outcomes is focused around flexible instruction, progress monitoring, and utilizing district resources and supports, competencies around instructional planning and reflection represent areas of growth. In particular, when reviewing how educators are planning their instruction, there are very few times when intentional collaboration and planning happens with other educators (only mentioned four times) who provide additional educational supports for targeted populations in the SLO. It was also mentioned (only three times) that there is any intentional planning around additional activities that can extend the learning through a home-school connection. Finally, the use of technology or planning across content areas
was only mentioned three times. When considering competencies as “... a repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (Wagner, 2006, p. 99) this intentional planning, collaboration, and extension activities are important edges of growth that can be expanded upon for educators at Red Elementary.

**Judgments and Recommendations**

At the beginning this research, I made several assumptions about how educators in District ES were utilizing student learning outcomes in relation to their instructional planning and implementation. These assumptions were based on a view of SLOs being a compliance activity that educators did not see value in. While some of my research revealed that educators believe that SLOs had either no impact or a negative impact on their instructional planning and delivery, 88 percent of educators (see Figure 3) shared that SLOs had a positive impact in both planning and delivery.

*Figure 4. Educator Reported Impact of SLOs on Instructional Planning and Delivery*

![Pie chart showing educator reported impact of SLOs on instructional planning and delivery.](image)

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*

While embarking on this journey, I have determined impacts relating to setting student learning outcomes on both classroom instruction and student achievement. As mentioned previously, 100 percent of the established SLOs were met by the students, and all
educators involved in this research at Red Elementary shared they utilized district baseline data based on district assessments and/or curriculum to create their SLOs. It can then be argued that classroom instruction is responsible for all students meeting their targeted growth measures. Figure 4 shows teachers (58.8 percent) reported that establishing SLOs has impacted their instructional delivery and (29.4 percent) reported it may have impacted their instructional delivery.

*Figure 5. Educator Reported Impact of SLOs on Instructional Planning and Delivery*

![Pie chart showing Impact of SLOs on Instructional Delivery](image)

**Note.** SLOs = Student Learning Objectives

The information contained in these two figures lead to the question: How are the teachers utilizing the SLO process to plan their instruction?

The primary impact that SLOs have had on teacher instructional planning regards their use of progress monitoring to plan next steps for students. Educators reported the following:

- “It is a way to root out the weak parts and work on them so the whole project turns out strong” (study participant, personal communication, September 25, 2018).
• “I use SLO to target students who I know are struggling with the specific skill. Using progress monitoring and benchmark assessments, I can keep track of who needs more Tier 2 instruction” (study participant, personal communication, February 20, 2019).

• “I use the data to see who I need to meet with and what we need to cover” (study participant, personal communication, March 3, 2019).

• “Considering the learning objectives and current student proficiency, I will break down and scaffold to support and extend students towards the learning target” (study participant, personal communication, March 4, 2019).

Data in Table 9 also shows that educators recognized they were able to dedicate time for progress monitoring throughout the SLO and the SLO process helped to determine the foundational skills students needed to be successful with the SLO.

Table 9

Data Results on Impact of SLO Process on Student Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of SLO Process on Student Achievement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All SLOs were met by Ss based on established District ES SLO rubric.</td>
<td>Mentioned 26 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated time for progress monitoring throughout SLO timeline.</td>
<td>Mentioned 9 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped to determine foundational skills needed to be successful with SLO.</td>
<td>Mentioned 2 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*
The use of progress-monitoring skills to support instructional planning is of huge value. In, *Driven By Data*, Paul Bambrick-Santoyo (2010) shared that after teachers have performed their progress monitoring, it is critical to “draw up action plans that describe how they will apply the insights they have gained” (p. 72). Bambrick-Santoyo (2010) further shared that effective actions plans may vary, but all share the same fundamental principle: “They are explicitly tied to conclusions from analysis and are designed to put such conclusions to practice” (p. 72). As educators at Red Elementary were able to progress monitor their students, they were able to develop action plans that helped students achieve the objectives created for them with the established SLO.

The data shows that 100 percent of the student learning outcome goals established by the educators were achieved—which directly connects to the impact of SLOs on student learning. But are there identifiable characteristics for teachers whose students are successful in accomplishing the established student learning outcome? A characteristic that all educators mentioned was the use of progress monitoring throughout the SLO process. Educators worked through a data analysis protocol that allowed them to tailor instruction to targeted populations and provide instructional delivery in many different forms (differentiated small group, workshop model, one-on-one support, instructional technology) in order to address areas of continued growth for students. This cycle is illustrated in Figure 6:
Another characteristic directly connected to the progress monitoring was the changes to instructional delivery made—based upon the data from progress monitoring. All the educators involved in this study reported utilizing progress-monitoring results to adjust the instructional plans for whole groups and/or small groups, as can be seen in Figure 7.

*Figure 7. Educator Reported Use of Progress Monitoring of SLO*

*Note. SLOs = Student Learning Objectives*
An area of growth that was revealed during this process was in reviewing the reflections by educators, once their SLOs were complete. While educators shared (11 times) specific details about how they would change their instructional delivery for the coming school year, there is no discussion about changes that can continue to be made to support mastery and continued growth in that particular area once the SLO process is complete. Additionally, it was only reported (four times) that the SLO process allowed the educator to support learners more flexibly using the prescribed curriculum. Both of these areas suggest a need to address organizational change related to the educator’s competencies with instructional planning. The third area suggesting additional supports needed for educators surrounds identifying the resources that educators feel they need to push their practice in establishing student learning outcomes. This connects to both the competencies of the educators at Red Elementary, as well as the conditions available to address the resources and time educators need to continue effectively utilizing SLOs to impact student academic achievement. These areas are discussed more in the To Be Framework.
CHAPTER FIVE: TO BE FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The research uncovered three areas of growth that needs to be addressed through organizational change at Red Elementary. The first area regards educator competencies around instructional planning through the flexible use of District ES’ prescribed curriculum. The second area connects to the current culture of how to utilize SLOs at Red Elementary. While 11 reflections shared ideas about how to make changes to instructional delivery and/or support for the coming school year with the learning objective created, there was no discussion or reflection on changes that can be made for the remainder of the current school year or for students who continue to struggle. The third area focuses on the competencies of educators and the available conditions to support the work of identifying and providing resources to educators to push their practice in the space of the SLOs they created. Wagner et al. (2006) shared the three phases in a change framework: “. . . preparing, envisioning, and enacting” (p. 133). In the preparing phase, it is literally the time to plan for the upcoming changes. There needs to be a:

Shared and informed understanding of the need and urgency for undertaking the change, changing how educators will need to take responsibility for preparing students to succeed, and plan for ways that educators will need to work differently with each other. (Wagner et al., 2006, p. 134)

This collective understanding and sense of urgency is extremely important when planning for the work that needs to be undertaken in relation to SLOs.
In the next phase, *envisioning*, the “understanding and urgency for the change expands to a greater audience. This includes “. . . adapting roles to support students effectively” (Wagner, 2006, p. 134). Finally, in the *enacting* phase, the change “efforts focus on which instructional practices work and what needs improvement” (Wagner, 2006, p. 134). These phases are important to remember when determining what can be a result of organizational change around SLOs.

**Envisioning the Success To-Be**

For a successful change plan implementation to happen, acknowledging the areas of change that need to be addressed to support long term success is crucial. Specifically, having a clear understanding of the changes to be made in the areas of educator competencies, system wide conditions, and culture.

**Instructional Planning**

The first area of change is concerned with educator competencies around instructional planning through the flexible use of District ES’ prescribed curriculum; flexible meaning, differentiated. Carol Ann Tomlinson (2000) shared her view of differentiation as follows:

One facet of expert teaching—it reminds us that these things are unlikely to happen for the full range of students unless curriculum and instruction fit each individual, unless students have choices about what to learn and how, unless students take part in setting learning goals, and unless the classroom connects with the experiences and interest of the individual. (p. 7)

Differentiation is truly focused on being a critical consumer of the curriculum and instruction and tailoring it to fit the student’s needs in the classroom each day. It is
necessary to support educators’ shifts into using baseline data that can be collected through the measures the prescribed curriculum District ES provides. Once the data has been collected, it is necessary to plan instruction based around student needs. Ball, Knobloch, and Hoop (2007) stated, “Research on teachers’ thought processes indicates that teachers tend to think about content and instructional strategies before objectives when they planned for classes” (p. 58). The research findings support thinking about resources and next steps for educators in order to better plan with objectives and assessments in mind—not just the materials or curriculum that is readily available to them. Tomlinson (2000) commented, “Curriculum tells us what to teach. Differentiation tells us how” (p. 9). To effectively differentiate for students, an educator must teach to the prescribed curriculum that is written based on the CCSS, but then must change how they are teaching. This becomes building competency around tiered instruction, also known as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). Averill, Rinaldi, and Collaborative, U. S. E. L. (2011) defined MTSS as the following:

Rooted in the data-informed practices, explicitly offers a multi-tier approach:

- Interventions available to students are typically categorized into three tiers.
- Emphasis is placed on schoolwide, differentiated universal core instruction at Tier 1; Tiers 2 and 3 provide intensive and increasingly individualized interventions.

(p. 92).

This approach creates opportunity to differentiate and fine tune instruction that has high expectations for all and builds in supports to address individualized needs as students and educators work through the curriculum together. Competency for educators needs to improve in such a way that allows the educators to use the curriculum as a guide for what
to teach, not *how*, and use that to support the learning that needs to take place to support SLOs.

**Resources for Educators**

A second area of change focuses on the competencies of educators and the need to consider the conditions available to support the work of identifying and providing resources to push their practice in the space of the SLOs they have created. As previously mentioned, one area that would support educators is digging more deeply into the MTSS structure to determine the different tiered approaches of instructional support needed by the students in their classroom. It was shared (25 times) that educators used differentiated, small group instruction to support students with the established SLO.

Averill, Rinaldi, and Collaborative, U. S. E. L. (2011) stated that MTSS must “Involve targeting specific areas in which students are struggling and applying increasingly intensive research-based interventions until the barriers to learning are addressed” (p. 91). The research-based interventions is a space where educators at Red Elementary need to build their competency in order to accurately identify the actual area of need, plan instruction for that, and identify proven intervention supports that will allow students to experience academic growth and effectively address their gaps in learning. Camp (2017) said, “Findings indicate that teachers’ goals may impact their professional growth and instructional effectiveness” (p. 61). For teachers to continue building their goal setting, instructional planning and delivery, and reflection, the available conditions need to be addressed. There needs to be clear, built-in time and resources made available to all educators when developing the planning, implementation, and assessment of SLOs.
Educators at Red Elementary mentioned (four times) they would like support finding additional resources to better address the established SLOs.

**High Expectations**

Similar to building competency around how to better differentiate instruction for students, the third area for change was concerned with how to support learning of objectives once the official SLO process concludes. This area for change is tied to both the culture and conditions of Red Elementary. Lacireno-Paquet et al. (2014) stated, “The SLO process is a method of setting up measurable goals, based on the specific assignment or class, the baseline performance of the students and the measurable gain in student performance during the course of instruction” (p. i). Educators at Red Elementary stated (15 times) that they created SLOs based on CCSS and utilized District ES’ curriculum and/or assessments (24 times) to guide their instruction. Every targeted student group met the established percentage of students meeting expectations on the established SLO by the educators at Red Elementary.

One has to wonder what are the next steps for students to continue pushing their learning within the school year. Educators at Red Elementary mentioned (11 times in SLO reflections) there are plans for how to improve or change instruction with this same skill for the coming school year, but no reflection on next steps for the next edges of growth tied to the standards the students are responsible for mastering at their grade level. High expectations within this space are key when scrutinizing the learning desired for students to master. This is further supported by the 2018 study by The New Teacher Project, who shared:
The system sends teachers the message that the material they teach and the practices they employ in their classrooms matter far more than the expectations they hold for their students. Yet teacher expectations had a stronger effect on student achievement growth than any other factor studied. (New Teacher Project 2018, p. 42)

The expectations that educators have, and in turn the assignments created for students, are based on the culture of the school or organization and the beliefs about the importance of the work students are asked to do. The educator beliefs in the student’s ability to accomplish the work being asked plays a factor as well.

Another area to explore is the conditions that have created the thought that it is important to plan next steps for the coming school year, but not next steps in learning once the SLO process has officially concluded. Creating conditions that allow educators to extend the learning and build-in the time and space for discussion and collaboration is important to support deeper learning and the support of all learners.

**Plan, Envision, and Enact**

To address change in the culture, conditions, and competencies for Red Elementary educators, it is important to plan, envision, and then enact steps that support an organizational change. The current data from educators who responded how they use SLOs at Red Elementary to plan and deliver instruction report success with the established SLOs they created. While this is an important celebration, also important is using schoolwide data that represents the gap in achievement between Caucasian students and students of other nationalities, such as Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Transparency about this gap is necessary at Red Elementary as it is a
specific need (see Appendix I for details). There needs to be a sense of urgency when the students at Red Elementary are significantly behind their Caucasian counterparts. The next step requires envisioning what a successful approach to utilizing SLOs would entail. There needs to be an additional focus on the common core standards and ways to use them to effectively plan instruction based on grade level mastery. Additionally, planning for differentiation and interventions to support all students is ideal. The final stage is enacting change in a way that focuses on improving instruction.

**Preparing/Planning.**

Data from the research showed that (15 times) educators used CCSS to help guide their planning of the SLOs and District ES curriculum and assessments were used (24 times) to guide instructional planning. However, when reviewing the targeted students in each SLO, each student performed under district and/or grade level expectations. Goals were written to support students performing under grade level, and while all students showed growth and all educators were able to report meeting their growth targets, many students were still not performing at grade level. The created SLOs focused on closing the academic gap, but not necessarily on allowing students to meet grade level expectations. As mentioned in, *The Opportunity Myth*, the gap between expectations and students being prepared for college and beyond continues to grow (The New Teacher Project, 2018). Low expectations are impacting the opportunities that are provided to the students who need them most. The sense of urgency around being able to plan effectively using CCSS and district curriculum needs to be acknowledged in order for all educators to support students who are most underserved in the education system and at Red Elementary—that is, students such as Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and
Asian Americans. A growing awareness of how to appropriately plan short- and long-term learning objectives for all students reflecting high expectations is crucial. Additionally, there needs to be an awareness of the importance of providing differentiated instruction for students and providing research-based intervention supports focused on building the capacity of students to meet grade level expectations. Tomlinson (2000) commented that differentiation, “Must be a refinement of, not a substitute for high-quality curriculum and instruction” (p. 7).

**Envisioning.**

Envisioning involves recognizing how all parties are taking greater responsibility and clarifying how to adapt to support student learning. Specifically, what are the changes needed for educators to clarify their responsibilities around creating SLOs for students and in turn, the responsibilities of administrators in supporting the implementation of rigorous and supportive SLOs? Educators need to rethink their planning of instruction and understand their responsibility to student achievement. Ball et al. (2007) explained a model of instructional planning that, “Represents the connection between what teachers think and believe and what they do” (p. 57). This connects once again to, The Opportunity Myth, which shared the impact of educators expectations on students achievements (The New Teacher Project, 2018). It is also important to connect this to the instructional core shared by City et al. (2009) and the interconnectedness between teacher, student, and the content. Make a change to one area and you must make a change to the other two components. It is necessary to envision a different approach to both educator instructional planning and delivery, but also looking at the content that educators are teaching and having a clear understanding of what students must have
mastered—and the path that educators will lead the students on to accomplish that mastery. Measuring mastery and student growth means that assessments need to be reviewed and reflect the rigor of the CCSS. Wiener (2013) stated, “Every assessment used to determine the teacher effectiveness, at least in classes where the Common Core applies, must reflect Common Core content and rigor” (p. 9). What does that rigor entail and do all educators have a solid understanding of it?

**Enacting.**

Enacting the plan involves improving instruction and in turn, student achievement. There are several components within this phase of the plan that needs to be carefully planned out. First, consider the professional development needed for educators to have a clear understand of the rigor and content of the common core standards—as well as the coherence between the standards. McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) stated:

> Understanding what students are expected to know before and after they are taught at a particular grade level provides the teacher with knowledge of what students should know coming into class and what they will need to know when they leave that class. This is necessary information for understanding students as well as planning instruction. (p. 155)

Change efforts need to focus on allowing educators a clear idea of grade level expectations, an understanding of prerequisite skills, and established student learning outcomes that prepare students for what’s next once mastering the skills needed for their grade level content. Building teacher competence around planning instruction based on the common core standards and creating a culture that uses assessment data to guide instruction, which allows for differentiated supports using the MTSS structure, will
positively impact student achievement and further push student learning to address the
gaps of achievement in student subgroups.

**Conclusion**

Red Elementary educators are following a clear process in establishing SLOs for
their students. One hundred percent of the educators have met their student growth targets
and all of the educators have shared using SLOs to help differentiate their learning. Even
with these accomplishments, there is space for improvement. By creating a more
systematized approach in instructional planning (focused around a deep understanding of
the CCSS and differentiating for the needs of all students), as well as planning and
implementing instruction that is focused on high expectations for all learners, there is an
opportunity for educators to have a greater impact on addressing the student academic
achievement gap between Caucasian students and students of other nationalities, such as
Native Hawaiians and American Indians. There needs to be an organizational shift
toward understanding what learning students are responsible for at each grade level, a
partnering with experts within the district (as well as professional development to
continue building educator competency), and a shift in the culture of the district to fully
embed the CCSS into all aspects of instructional planning and delivery. Doing so presents
a great opportunity to move forward in creating a more equitable instructional experience
for students and allowing even more student growth related to SLOs.
CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Utilizing the results that the data collected has shown me about the impacts of student learning objectives on teacher instructional planning and delivery I have been able to develop strategies and actions that can be implemented to support a focused change plan for Red Elementary.

Introduction

Forman, Stosich, and Bocala (2017) stated, “Developing a strategy requires not only a vision of the instructional core but also a plan of action for the professional learning and collaboration required to realize change” (p. 118). When looking at Red Elementary educators through the lens of the data collected, there are several positive outcomes related to the academic growth of the students, as well as the educators using their SLOs to help support differentiation and regular progress monitoring to help plan instruction. While these are celebrations, there is also space to improve upon the learning objectives educators are creating and that impact their academic success. A vision for success of all students—beyond just the timeline of SLOs—can be recognized and help to further impact educator’s instructional planning and delivery beyond a compliance measure for their evaluation. Strategies can be categorized by looking at the competencies of the educators, the conditions for learning and teaching for the students, and the culture of the school.

The strategies that can best support continued growth for educators at Red Elementary can be categorized with Wagner’s (2006) 4 C’s—specifically focusing on competency, conditions, and culture. When looking at educator competency, there are
three strategies that can be further developed to positively impact both instructional and SLOs:

1. Increasing differentiated learning opportunities for students.
2. Creating more learning around MTSS structures and supports for educators.
3. Building a deeper understanding of the expectations and level of rigor written into the CCSS.

Strategies around conditions include a focus on the structure of MTSS supports for students at Red Elementary, time and focus spent on goal setting, the impacts of personal beliefs about goals and creating effective goals, and more focused time spent on collaboration and support with instructional planning and delivery. Finally, strategies focusing on reshifting some of the culture around goal setting and focusing on SLOs is necessary. Within this space, it is important to focus on the impact of goal setting beyond the timeline of completion for the SLOs that are required as part of the evaluation system. Additionally, the culture of high expectations for all students needs to be examined through an honest lens that allows educators to determine the types of expectations they have for the students being targeted in SLOs and how these expectations impact the student's overall learning and academic achievement.

**Culture, Conditions, and Competencies**

Creating organizational change takes adaptive leadership. According to Heifetz et al. (2009) adaptive leadership is, “An iterative process involving: (1) observing events and patterns; (2) interpreting what you are observing; (3) designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations” (p. 32). The strategies and actions outlined are a result of collecting data from events and patterns connected to SLOs, interpreting the
data, and creating strategies and actions that support organizational change at Red Elementary and potentially within District ES. In, *Making Strategic Planning Work*, Reeves (2007) offered a definition of strategy and shared, “Strategy is a collection of actions that add value” (p. 87). Thinking about the strategies planned and the actions that need to happen to support the plan is necessary in envisioning the success of an organizational change. The proposed changes for Red Elementary can be organized within three of Wagner’s 4 C’s: Culture, Conditions, and Competency.

**Culture**

It is important to focus on the cultural shifts that need to take place. Wagner (2006) defined culture as, “the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations and behaviors related to students and learning, teachers and teaching, instructional leadership and the quality of relationships within and beyond the school” (p. 102). When considering the culture around SLOs, it is important to think about the current state of beliefs surrounding SLOs and then create strategies and actions that will support a new culture around using continued goal setting for student learning beyond the SLO timeline. Additionally, thinking about the types of expectations that the Red Elementary teachers have for the targeted student populations for their SLOs is integral. The first strategy and its accompanying actions to explore involves focusing on goal setting as an instructional practice beyond the SLO process as part of the teacher evaluation system.

Frederick Luneburg (2011) commented, “Goals have a pervasive influence on behavior and performance . . . Goals motivate people to develop strategies that will enable them to perform at the required goal level” (pp. 1–2). Connecting this to a strategy of extending goal setting beyond the SLO completion represents an important shift in the
beliefs about the impact of goal setting on student achievement—beyond what is being used as part of the teacher evaluation system. The strategy of refocusing on the frequency and type of goal setting that educators engage in offers the opportunity to impact student learning beyond the timeline prescribed in the SLO timeline that all districts create in order to be in compliance with PERA.

The first action that needs to take place is in supporting a strategy of continued goal setting beyond SLOs is to a focus on lesson planning that includes addressing and integrating the following: “Objectives for student learning, teaching and learning activities, and strategies to check student understanding” (Milkova, 2012, p. 1). The objectives for student learning include what the CCSS outlines for student mastery in Math or ELA and the goals for the learning.

An important question to regularly consider is, What do I want my students to learn? This question helps frame the learning goals for the lesson. An important next step is determining how to measure student success with the established objectives for learning. This cycle of planning is a shift in how curriculum is used by educators at Red Elementary. Data shows that the educators used District ES curriculum to plan for their SLO, but the flexible use of this curriculum to address student needs was identified as a strategy—which will be explored in the Competency section of this chapter. Creating specific time where educators are collaborating on the learning that is being planned is essential to creating a culture focused around targeted and supportive instruction that allows all educators to support each other and their students. Douglas Reeves (2009) believed, “Every collaboration meeting must have defined results with specific and measurable adult actions” (p. 47). This cultural shift is necessary for educators to have a
clear path about how to plan their instruction and the goals being created for student learning. Reeves (2009) continued, “Collaboration requires practice” (p. 48). Having dedicated time that allows educators to practice creating plans focused on specific objectives, having clear learning goals, and planning how progress will be measured is a necessity. This is all connected to what Lunenburg (2011) shared about goal setting. Lunenburg said, “Specific goals let members know what to reach for and allow them to measure their progress” (p. 3). An additional point to think about is the type of work being presented to targeted students for the established SLO.

The New Teacher Project (2018) found, “Teacher expectations for students’ success against grade-level standards demonstrated the strongest relationship to student growth” (p. 23). The key connection with holding high expectations aligned to standards is that while many educators stated (during their interviews) that they used SLOs to plan instruction, they also said they targeted students that were far behind the grade level expectations for achievement in order to support their learning. As an administrator, I have seen it many times over that educators are focused on filling in gaps of unfinished learning, but in doing so, are not creating opportunities for students who are behind to engage in and grapple with grade level appropriate work that reflects the rigor or high expectations of the standards. It is important to realize the impact of educator beliefs and support for high level learning and comparing that to the work being presented to their students. The New Teacher Project (2018) stated the following:

While 82 percent of teachers were supportive of state-level standards in theory, just 44 percent of teachers believed their own students could meet such high demands. When that translates into choices about content and instruction-and into
the message those choices send to students-it makes a meaningful impact on students’ school experiences and outcomes. (p. 41)

This same mindset impacts the culture of educators around the view of student learning and mastery, and how to support students with CCSS’ high expectations—regardless of their perceived ability level. In addressing this view, educators need to unpack any biases they may have about the abilities of the students sitting in front of them. Every person has bias and these biases impact the choices and decisions one makes and does. When an educator does not believe their student can meet the high demands of grade level work, he or she will not push the student to meet these expectations. In addition to unpacking possible biases, a shift in the type of work that is put in front of students must be made.

Reviewing the type of work being presented to students—especially those that may be targeted within a SLO—is integral to success. The New Teacher Project (2018) commented that a gap in achievement exists because, “So few assignments actually gave students a chance to demonstrate grade-level mastery . . . Students in classrooms with stronger assignments or higher levels of engagement experienced about two additional months of learning” (pp. 21, 23). So, in thinking about the beliefs that educators hold about the students they are targeting, unpacking the biases that exist with those beliefs, and then critically reviewing the instruction and type of work being expected of the student, is closely tied to the instructional core that Richard Elemore detailed in a 2010 interview where he stated, “Patterns, and expectations about what students can do, and preconceived notions about what kind of task is appropriate to ask students” (p. 4) are actually much lower-level than educators and administrators think they are. There needs to be a culture of digging deeply into the content that educators and students are
grappling with, planning instruction that meets the rigor of that content, and then revising instructional practices to meet that level of rigor. This takes time, collaboration, and a dedication to shifting the beliefs within a system away from using SLOs as a compliance activity and into an understanding of the impact that goal setting and SLOs has on student achievement. These shifts tie directly into the conditions that need to be addressed in supporting the cultural shift around extended goal setting and high expectations for students.

Conditions

Wagner et al. (2006) defined conditions as the, “External architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space and resources” (p. 101). The conditions that currently exist at Red Elementary support the use of student learning outcomes as a means to measure student achievement for the teacher evaluation system. As the vision of what SLOs can be moves, the culture needs to shift into creating time for continued goal setting and reviewing expectations for students and the work that is put in front of them. To do this, the conditions with which educators work need to change to support this shift. Within conditions, we need to address how goal setting is conducted for all educators within the system. Creating conditions that support time and resources around how to establish SMART goals and then connecting them to the evaluation system will be necessary.

In District ES, all educators have a 40-minute planning time each day of the week—time allotted for planning instruction, meeting with grade level or content area teams, attending special education meetings, or meeting with other professionals in the school setting. Per the educator’s union contract, the administrator is able to plan one
grade level meeting a month—the remaining meetings are to be planned by the educators themselves. Thinking about the condition of time and resources, a strategy to utilize needs to focus on collaborating with teacher teams to build-in dedicated time to goal creation, implementation, and progress monitoring.

To support this work, there needs to be built in one-on-one time with each educator to unpack some of their cultural beliefs about the students they are targeting, and then determining how to support learning (with setting rigorous goals) that will push students to accomplish the high expectations of the CCSS. Kouzes and Posner (2012) believed that supporting face-to-face interactions represents a major action to take when impacting change; furthermore, “People can act as a cohesive team only when they have some amount of face time with each other” (p. 236). To support a change in the conditions surrounding how SLOs are developed, implemented, progress monitored, and ultimately evaluated, collaboration and being a cohesive team needs to take place. By creating specific time throughout the SLO process to meet with each educator, administrators can better support goal setting focused around high expectations for students, provide support with planning and resources for pushing student achievement, and challenge identified biases an educator or administrator may have about the students in the targeted SLO population.

Another strategy regarding the conditions at Red Elementary is closely connected to the time that needs to be carved out for the development, implementation, and progress monitoring of established SLOs—but also instruction in general. As mentioned, every educator has a daily 40-minute prep period he or she can use for planning, grading, meetings, and more. By using this time a bit differently, building in specific planning,
questioning, and coaching support to educators allows for more focused time and energy on instructional planning that supports the success of the established SLO and planning on high-quality instruction for all students. By addressing the real conditions of time and space, the opportunity exists to impact how SLOs are discussed throughout their timeline between administrators and educators—both individually and in teams. Using a protocol to analyze student progress and establishing a timeline for reflection and planning will support educators in long-term planning.

This measure supports and fosters more accountability; Kouzes and Posner (2012) stated, “When people take personal responsibility and are held accountable for their actions, their colleagues are much more inclined to want to work with them, and are more motivated to cooperate in general” (p. 252). When thinking about how to further support a culture of collaboration, the accountability piece is a must. By restructuring the time spent talking about the SLO, there are additional opportunities for educators and administrators to build the conditions that will support taking the time to clearly articulate student success, how to plan instruction more clearly to support student success, and to collaborate and work together to plan and implement high quality teaching. This is a final strategy to explore within the conditions at Red Elementary—involving the structure of MTSS.

The Council of Great City Schools (2012) shared the following about MTSS:

An evidence-based model of education that employs data-based problem-solving techniques to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention. This integrated instruction and intervention system is provided to students in varying levels of intensities—or tiers—based on student needs. This needs-driven
decision-making model seeks to ensure that district resources reach the appropriate students (and schools) at suitable levels of quality and concentration to accelerate the performance of ALL students. (p. 4)

This model requires time and resources to support growing teacher capacity, a refocusing of instructional planning and support, and clear systems and protocols to follow in planning instruction for students. Considering how SLOs are typically established, the targeted student population is typically students requiring Tier 3 support. The Council of the Great City Schools (2012) shared the following regarding Tier 3 support:

Characterized by increased time and intensity spent on a narrowed and more focused curriculum for students who continue to struggle after receiving academic and behavioral support in Tiers 1 and 2. In Tier 3, instruction remains aligned with the Common Core State Standards and includes necessary supplemental academic and behavioral instruction, and supports. (pp. 4–5)

There needs to be focused time to unpack what the structure of Tiers 1, 2, and 3 instruction to support student learning means in context of the curriculum, student performance, teacher capacity, and systems and protocols in place that address this more focused and supportive instructional model. When focusing more on MTSS, the first necessary action is to build-in time during team meetings to unpack the instruction being implementing with the students, then using the data to determine progress, and as an administrator, better support the data analysis that needs to take place to determine mastery or areas of need and rigorous instructional planning. Implementing a regular cycle of data analysis, as recommended by Bambrick-Santoyo (2010) and Hamilton et al. (2009), allows for educators and the administrators who support them to, “develop a
hypothesis about how to improve student learning, modify instruction to test hypothesis and increase student learning, collect and prepare a variety of data about student learning” (p. 4) Using the prep time teachers have each week to review and implement this cycle will lead to a deeper understanding of where students are, how to support them, and how to measure growth through time. This goes for the targeted student populations that teachers have identified in their SLO as well as for the class as a whole. An additional action that needs to be taken to support better utilizing an MTSS process and procedure is creating resources that are easily accessible to educators to help plan interventions and instruction focused on supporting learners at Tiers 1, 2, and 3 based on the grade level and common core standard expectations. This connects directly with the cultural shift that needs to happen when focusing on high expectations for all learners and planning and implementing instruction that represents these expectations.

**Competency**

Wagner et al. (2006) defined competencies as, “the repertoire of skills and knowledge that influences student learning” (p. 99). Student learning outcomes are literally goals established to support student learning; rethinking the competencies educators need in order to support and improve student learning is essential. Each strategy within the competency area focuses around what City et al. (2010) described as components of the instructional core that support and improve student learning:

1. increase the level of knowledge and skill that the teacher brings to the instructional process.

2. increase the level and complexity of the content that students are asked to learn.
(3) change the role of the student in the instructional process. (p. 24)

The first strategy to build educator-competency around SLOs is to evaluate the knowledge and skills educators bring to the instructional process connected with the CCSS. A second strategy is to focus on the goal-setting process and change the student’s role in the instructional process. A final strategy is to increase educators’ abilities to differentiate instruction in a way that increases the level and complexity of the content and maintains the necessary high expectations that we know impacts student learning.

While collecting data about how educators at Red Elementary planned their SLOs, the CCSS directly related to the SLO were explicitly mentioned (15 times). Stephanie Hirsh (2012) stated that because the common core focuses on the application of knowledge in more authentic ways, educators will need to employ, “Instructional strategies that integrate critical and creative thinking, collaboration, problem-solving, research and inquiry and presentation and demonstration skills” (p. 1). Educators and administrators need to build their competency around the types of instructional strategies they use to address the CCSS as well as thinking about the SLOs and the instruction they are planning with those specific goals in mind.

When planning how to support building educator competency around the standards, the professional development educators are provided to support their understanding of the shifts in the common core standards and considering the skills educators need to build to support these shifts will be integral. Bostic and Matney (2013) commented, “Professional development ought to support teachers to maintain effective instructional contexts and adapt to new challenges . . . Teachers need support to refine and improve their instructional practices to implement the recently adopted standards”
(Bostic & Matney, 2013, pp. 12–13). In the report, *Using Teacher Evaluation Reform and Professional Development to Support Common Core Assessments*, Peter Youngs (2013) stated professional development should help “teachers acquire both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge” (pp. 7–8).

Red Elementary already has conditions to support this professional learning through its regularly scheduled team meetings with the administrator each week and staff meetings twice a month that offer time for professional learning, collaboration, and support with both the standards and reviewing of student data to gain a clear picture on student progress, success, and next edges of growth. It is imperative there is a clear partnership with instructional coaches that support developing teacher capacity with the shifts in the standards and using the current curriculum to support those shifts. Next, it is important to create meeting time and space that allows educators to be engaged with learning that is active, personal, and focused on the instructional practices that support high expectations and student success with the standards. This professional development needs to be ongoing and adaptive to the needs of the educators receiving it. Additionally, the way in which the professional development is delivered needs to model best practices of instruction and support so it can be experienced and discussed before educators take those practices into their classrooms. Aligned with this professional development is to take action around how to support goal setting.

Fred Lunenburg (2011) shared research stating, “The most effective performance seems to result when goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance and linked to feedback on results, and create commitment and acceptance” (p. 1). This is integral to keep in mind when supporting addressing the next strategy
around goal setting and improving educator competency. It will be relevant to gain a better understanding of where educators are in terms of their ability to create specific and challenging goals that are focused, linked to regular progress monitoring, and something students and educators are partnering with together. When providing professional learning (at staff meetings regarding the common core standards and their shifts), there is a natural connection and level of practice that can happen when asking educators to think about what goals they can set with the expectations embedded in the standards. Spending time to gather data about how educators set their SLOs, the types of tools educators use to progress monitor, and how educators plan their instruction is critical in determining how to best enter the goal-setting conversation.

As an administrator, I can use this information to help better guide the discussions and supports I provide to ensure high-quality goals are being created that are focused on supporting high expectations aligned with grade level common core standards and that it helps to guide instructional planning and delivery. I currently do not do these things as an administrator. While collecting the data for this research, I recognized this as an area of growth for my own practice, as well as a leverage opportunity to shift using SLOs as a compliance activity to one that benefits all students in the classroom. Once there is a clearer understanding of the needs of the educators with how to establish goals, it’s then time to address the student’s role in this work.

In a 2010 interview with The Principals Congress, Richard Elmore shared that, “In the US, there is not enough high-level work going on in classrooms to get really robust cause and effect relationships, because the tasks we are asking students to do are so mediocre” (Constante, p. 6). High expectations of all have repeatedly been shown to
positively impact student learning. When setting SLOs for students, educators need support with how to engage students in the goals-setting process, how to make students aware of what they are working toward and why, and planned instruction around supporting the students’ ability to accomplish the established goals. Again, this goes back to better using the common core standards and level of rigor that these standards require—both in the work the students are asked to do and the lessons being taught. This directly connects to building an educator’s competency around differentiation.

A final strategy to implement focuses on building educator competency focuses on instructional differentiation. Tomlinson (2000) said that differentiation, “Is a way of thinking about teaching and learning” (p. 6). This way of thinking is about recognizing the different needs of students—the way they best learn and how to use best practices to support students being pushed with high expectations in different ways. Tomlinson (2000) continued, “Differentiation builds on the core teaching and learning practices that are solid, it is what you do to refine them for maximum individual growth” (p. 7).

Thinking about differentiation through the lens of student learning outcomes, it is important to support the educator’s understanding of the instructional core or the relationships between the teacher, student, and content being taught. All three components work together to support student success—making changes to just one of these components will not impact student learning. Differentiation then, is really about thinking differently about the student’s and teacher’s role, and the role of the content being taught. An action that will help support shifting this lens for educators will be building-in more time to analyze lesson plans, reflecting regularly on student data, and collaborating to determine next steps for student success.
Educators from Red Elementary only reported (five times) that they spent time reflecting on their established SLOs regarding differentiating instructional supports for their students. They went on to report that (only four times) they did not use their SLOs to help support collaborative planning with other educators. Building the capacity of the educator to better plan differentiated support for their students (both individually and collaboratively with their colleagues) is essential for pushing forward high expectations and well-rounded experiences of support for all students.

**Conclusion**

These proposed strategies and actions must be accomplished through a very careful professional development plan focused on better addressing the culture, conditions, and competencies of the educators around creating SLOs; planning instruction focused on student success with high expectations; progress-monitoring student growth; and reflection around the impact, effectiveness, and next steps for the students in the classroom. City et al. (2009) stated, “Tenets of professional development are: content-focused, sustained learning close to the work, and context-specific with time for practitioners to apply what they’re learning to their own settings” (p. 134). There are challenges that arise from supporting SLOs to be used in a way that measures teacher effectiveness and more importantly, supports student growth. The Reform Support Network (n.d.) stated that, “Professional development will be critical to the success of SLOs. Areas to consider are creating a coherent theory of action on how SLOs are intended to support instructional practice, student learning and school and district missions” (p. 5).
Each strategies and actions shared in this section needs to be supported by professional development. Additionally, so too does working with a clear leadership team to support the buy-in and shifting of the cultural beliefs at Red Elementary around SLOs and their impact on instruction and student growth. With a sharp focus on the following, the system will begin to shift toward utilizing SLOs as a tool to support learning and not as an activity that has to be performed as part of the evaluation system:

- Shifting the culture.
- Improving conditions to focus on student data.
- Instructional collaboration and partnership.
- Time to support building educator competencies around how to write and plan for high-quality goals focused on the standards.

With a sharp focus on utilizing student data, instructional collaboration and partnership, and building-in time and opportunity to plan and write high-quality goals for students, the system will begin to shift toward utilizing SLOs as a tool to support learning and away from being merely a compliance activity for evaluation purposes.
CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Once the To-Be plan is fully implemented, it is necessary to determine the implications of the change plan and determine recommendations for policy at the district level that supports the proposed change plan.

Introduction

While collecting and analyzing the data related to how teachers use SLOs to plan instruction, I was struck by the shift teachers made throughout the school year and the way they utilized their SLOs to plan instruction. When I began at my organization, the use of SLOs was completely used as a compliance activity. Educators were unfamiliar with the process of establishing high-quality SLOs and did not utilize it in conjunction with their instructional planning. When it was time to analyze student growth and make reflections, many provided generic answers. In 2010, the PERA was signed into law by then Governor Pat Quinn. The PERA requires that all teacher evaluation systems include a student growth component, and ES District utilizes teacher created SLOs for this metric. Teachers are able to choose the tool, focus, content area, and duration of their SLO, but need to follow the guidelines created by the district for data analysis, data entry, reflection, and final check-in.

I was specifically interested in the way SLOs are utilized within this school district. Within the To-Be plan, I share strategies that support moving SLOs from merely a compliance activity to a useful tool that helps educators plan and deliver high-quality instruction, while positively impacting student achievement. These strategies include creating conditions that promote additional time for educators and administrators to progress monitor, analyze student data, and plan instruction that is differentiated using
MTSS. Creating policy that supports these shifts in both culture, conditions, and competencies is necessary in order to support full implementation and a focus on impacting student achievement through high expectations and rigorous teaching.

**Policy Statement**

I recommend an amendment to the current school policy related to how SLOs are created and utilized for instruction. The data shows that educators are creating SLOs that positively impact student achievement. The data also shows that educators are using SLOs to plan for small group instruction (as needed) related to the specific goal outlined in the SLO. However, there is a lack of differentiated support that extends to the learning necessary to continue student success once the SLO is complete. Also, there is a lack of tiered support for students within the classroom and a lack of collaboration and time spent on progress monitoring and using the data to plan and deliver rigorous instruction based on CCSS and high expectations of all students.

A revision to the current District ES policy related to the process educators and administrators follow to collaboratively create the SLO is recommended. This entails creating a more detailed outline within the District ES Student Learning Objectives Handbook that details expectations for collaboration, progress monitoring, data analysis, and reflection steps. These changes to the current policy can impact a deeper understanding of the importance of creating student learning outcomes and be used to plan actual instruction supporting the student growth teachers look for. This allows for more coherence when talking about support needed to students, creates an environment focused on a regular cycle of improvement, and builds collaborative relationships that allow for multiple ways to support student success.
Analysis of Needs

When recommending any policy change, it is necessary to analyze the different needs that are connected to the policy proposal.

Educational Analysis

By addressing PERA at the district level, the policy that needs revising is the current way SLOs are developed and progress monitored throughout a school year. Doing so provides additional reflection, flexibility, and awareness of the importance of goal setting with instructional planning. District ES currently allows educators to either create their own SLO based on student assessment or use a SLO created in a bank [collection of preapproved SLOs collected by District ES] that is available to all educators in the district. It is important to remember what Locke and Latham (2002) shared, as one of the foundational principles of the goal setting theory, “. . . that setting specific, difficult goals produces stronger outcomes than setting easy or medium goals of simply trying to do your best” (p. 62).

With shifting the policy toward collaboration with administration and educators, there will be more opportunity to ensure that the SLOs are specific and rigorous, and will in turn, impact student learning. Staff will be better able to target specific subgroups of students or particular academic areas of need. Regular progress monitoring allowed staff to better utilize the data and curriculum to plan more effective instruction. Also, when revising the policy to include more focused time around reflection, progress monitoring, and collaborative planning, there are greater opportunities to dig into student work, align instruction with the CCSS, and plan for next steps to support student growth.
**Economic Analysis**

When analyzing the economics of this policy change, there needs to be minimal monies spent. District ES is currently using a system of SLOs as part of the annual evaluation for each teacher within the district. According to Odden (2012), “A strategic approach to using the education dollar means aligning the use of resources to a solid, powerful and comprehensive education-improvement strategy” (p. 4). The proposed policy changes the way this system is currently used and does not add anything in addition to what is already being done. With this policy, there will be a more comprehensive link between teacher’s setting SLOs and an improved educational experience for students. Ultimately, by incorporating a clearer timeline of planning, implementation, progress monitoring, and reflection, student learning will increase—which will positively impact each school throughout the district.

**Social Analysis**

In considering the social implications, both the relationships within the school between teachers and administrators and the relationship with the families were examined. Heifetz et al. (2009) suggested that when moving through challenges and changes at an adaptive level, it is important to surface cultural norms and forces. Heifetz et al. (2009) continued, “Adaptive leadership requires understanding the group’s culture and assessing which aspects of it facilitate change and which stand in the way” (p. 57).

The proposed revision to District ES’ SLO policy focuses around understanding the current culture, competencies, and conditions associated with SLO development and reflection, and support the change. When thinking about a midpoint reflection, there will not be an opportunity for collaboration and discussion (amongst administration) about
how learning is progressing nor sharing accountability for student learning. Furthermore, allowing the administrator to determine where the areas of need are within the building (as a whole) and planning for the types of supports needed for continued student growth cannot be explored.

Finally, thinking about the relationships between teachers and families represents a wonderful opportunity to provide more transparency in the learning happening in classrooms—the opportunity to partner with families to support learning (both at school and at home)—which will allow families to have a better idea of what the learning goals are for their child without having to wait for the report card. All of this leads to a deeper partnership for learning with stakeholders in multiple arenas that will not only strengthen student learning, but also create a climate of collaboration and support.

Political Analysis

According to Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, and Jarvis (2004), there are two types of policies:

1. Instrumental policies that connect with their original intentions.
2. Symbolic policies which have no effect or do not connect with original intentions.

Part of the politics involved in teacher evaluation involves a mystique about what teachers are evaluated on and how they are able to represent their effectiveness. An area that needs consideration is how the district and the teacher’s union will partner together to make necessary changes to the structure of how SLOs are used within the district. Additionally, there needs to be support from the union to help increase buy-in and understanding of the importance of SLOs for teacher effectiveness. Heifetz et al. (2009)
stated that acting politically means, “Using your awareness of the limits of your own authority, and of stakeholders’ interests, as well as power and influence networks in your organization . . .” (p. 133). When moving forward with revising the SLO process in District ES, it will be critical to address how to partner with the teacher’s union. Careful consideration must be given to how the union feels about SLOs, the history of how SLOs have been used throughout the district, and a rebranding of what SLOs can mean for student learning. There has to be buy-in from all parties. Additionally, administrators need a deep understanding of what a revised SLO process would look like to ensure accountability, practical goal setting, and support for all teachers. When there is a deep understanding and transparency at all levels, the ability to enact this policy change will be more sustainable and approached with less fear and push back.

Legal Analysis

The suggested shifts in the district policy are connected to the requirements set forth by the PERA and as such, does not change the legal policy. There will continue to be a growth metric used for the teacher evaluations. This policy proposes changing the timeline and the steps needed for teachers to follow, per district implementation.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

In reviewing the PERA and thinking about how it is implemented within the district where the research was conducted, I found that the intention of the policy is to ensure that student growth is a component of teacher evaluation. But the way in which District ES has adopted the policy represents a disconnect between the original intention and the actual application. The way that SLOs are currently used in the district are more as a measure of compliance rather than helping to guide student learning through the
means of instructional planning and best practices. Examining instruction—both in the planning and implementation phases that are aligned to the student learning outcomes planned—supports additional growth and allows educators to have a clearer picture of the learning students are accomplishing. With regular progress monitoring, families will have a better understanding of student progress and clarity on areas of need for their child(ren).

It is also crucial to consider the use of student learning outcomes through the lens of the test-taker. In, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*, Ravitch (2016) cautioned that using tests to “. . . make important decisions about people’s lives . . . are not precise instruments” (p. 161). Ravitch (2016) also shared that another problem with accountability measures is that there is “. . . something fundamentally wrong with an accountability system that disregards the many factors that influence students’ performance” (p. 173). It will be integral to reflect on when to enact a policy tied to using student outcome measures in teacher evaluation. As well, reflecting on how educators are supporting students and educators in order to have successful outcomes representing true measures of student learning.

**Implications for Staff and Community Relationships**

When considering the revisions to the current district policy (related to how SLOs are written), progress-monitored, and other reflections, staff relationships will need to undertake some type of strengthening process; meaning, a targeted time and support for the following:

1. Purposeful collaboration
2. Lesson plan analysis
3. Progress-monitoring data assessment opportunities

4. Huge dose of trust building.

Trust building is a necessary requirement so that educators can talk openly about how their students are performing, what instruction has looked like, and an openness to making changes to instructional implementation in order to maximize impact on student learning.

Time and direction should be provided to educators so they learn how to better use their SLOs when planning instruction. This needs to happen at a building wide level (while grade level or content area teachers are collaborating) and at a district level to leverage the expertise of instructional coaches and focus on integrating curriculum with the established SLO. In looking at the educator population who participated in this study, I notice that educators need a clearer protocol for how to talk about student progress. Specifically, educators need time to reflect on the growth that may or may not have occurred and try it back to classroom instruction. For these things to happen, how time is used within the building needs to be assessed to leverage everyone’s expertise. Also required is a determination of how to move the needle for students and allow them to accomplish the growth targets established in the SLO. Trust needs to be built amongst staff so they can share ideas and resources and trust built with the students to push learning.

It is essential that communities within each school and classroom have clarity on what the students are working toward. There is no reason a family member should not know what targeted goals a teacher has for his or her child and the steps the teacher plans to follow to support him or her in reaching that goal. This represents a shift from what is
commonly done. Families have access to the curriculum and general pacing of lessons, but are rarely included in the goals set for their child(ren) and are not communicated with regarding the ways educators will be working to support the students in accomplishing those goals. Communicating these things creates an environment of transparency and accountability for all parties related to the student’s success in reaching the goals that have been created for them.

In considering the more global impact of this policy revision, it makes sense for each school to have teachers creating SLOs that then support the schoolwide goals established for the school as a whole. It will be important to communicate these to the entire district. From the superintendent to the school board, there should be clarity around the goals schools are working to accomplish and transparency around the steps everyone is taking to accomplish those goals. Smith et al. (2004) said, “When viewed through the lens of political spectacle, policy making is the means through which constituencies or persons gain and manipulate power”. When sharing this policy with the entire community, it is necessary to address the impact this will have on teachers, students, and district and community expectations. If there is a level of transparency, data analysis, and reporting, there can be more collaboration amongst the board, district offices, and community organizations to determine how to support all students. District ES educators have worked hard as a community to identify subgroups of students who need additional support and instructional focus; however, they do not plan collaboratively. There is a lot of finger pointing that does not allow for shared ownership and reflection on how these educators are supporting students throughout the school year.
Summary

To improve the education system, there needs to be an approach that looks not only at what happens in the classroom (in this case, the utilization of SLOs), but also, looks at the policies supporting best practices for classrooms and districts as a whole. A review of the policies currently in place (PERA, for this example) and determining what changes can be made to policy (to accomplish the goals set out at the heart of a policy) will be significant to this process. With PERA in mind, the focus on student outcomes as a part of a teacher evaluation system is useful in helping teacher’s rethink their instructional planning and practices.

Some final steps for district’s to examine involves determining the best way to implement the policy in efforts of seeing the desired growth for their students and teachers. In proposing an additional midpoint check-in and reflection, there will be more clarity on the progress students are making, a clearer understanding of what planning and practices are supporting student growth, and an opportunity for adjustment aligned to how the students are showing their growth. There needs to be a regular cycle of analysis for SLOs for them to be truly effective for student growth, as well as to be used as a tool by educators in guiding their instruction. It is time to connect the use of SLOs to the daily practice of teaching and learning to the classroom, and this revised policy implementation will do just that.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, I developed a clearer understanding of the current state of District ES in relation to SLOs. Using this understanding, I designed a change plan that supports a more cohesive approach for educators to follow that pushes their practice with establishing SLOs. Finally, I have identified implications of the change plan and a policy proposal that support further development for educators. Throughout the entire process, I learned several leadership lessons that allow me to further develop my own capacity as an instructional leader.

Introduction

Lachlan-Haché et al. (2012) commented that the benefits of SLOs include, “Reinforcing best teaching practices, they are adaptable, acknowledge the value of educator knowledge and skill, encourage collaboration and connect teacher practice to student learning” (pp. 1–2). The core of this research has been the question, *What are the impacts of setting student learning objectives on classroom instruction and student achievement?* In collecting data throughout this research, I have answered that question. When planning instruction, educators refer to their SLOs and plan differentiated instruction. Referencing the CCSS, educators report regular progress monitoring and flexible supports to adapt their instruction based on the needs of the students in front of them. The educators in this research have shown they work hard to deliver instruction in small groups in order to provide more targeted, tiered support. Essentially, educators are exemplifying the first benefit of SLOs, which Lachlan-Haché et al. (2012) referred to as, “reinforcing best teaching practices” (p. 1).
Student learning objectives provide a powerful opportunity to really focus on areas of needed learning for students and allow opportunities to creatively plan and implement instruction that can maximize student achievement. By making small changes throughout the system, an opportunity exists to move away from SLOs being merely a compliance activity and create an opportunity that really guides meaningful instructional planning, progress monitoring, and reflection that then allows educators to maximize their impact on student learning.

Discussion

This section provides a synthesis of the program evaluation, the change plan, and the policy advocacy components of the research.

Program Evaluation

The Ohio Department of Education (2012) defined SLOs as, “A measure of the teacher’s impact on student learning within a given interval on instruction” (p. 5). This traditional view of SLOs created a culture of believing that SLOs are only a tool to measure educator impact. Working through this research, I argue that SLOs can be so much more. When collecting data on how educators use SLOs to plan and guide their instruction, I uncovered many opportunities for collaboration, purposeful planning, and using the resources and systems already in place as a tool to help shift the view of SLOs being only a compliance activity.

Educators regularly reflected on the impact of the SLO as being something that helped them to better plan small group instruction, differentiate learning opportunities for their students, and utilize progress monitoring to guide planning. Reflections showed insights that allowed educators to think how to plan this same instruction differently
when encountering the skill or standard again with students. These reflections can be capitalized on when thinking about how to shift the use of SLOs and the planning process that was proposed in the organizational change. While there is no change in the use of SLOs there is power in shifting how SLOs are utilized systemically that will allow for more focus on marginalized student groups, support difficult conversations about student learning and teacher expectations, and build opportunities for more development around instructional planning and delivery with targeted approaches that will benefit all students.

**Organizational Plan**

The areas of improvement that arose based on the data collected in the program evaluation point more toward how instruction is being planned and with what resources. This focuses around the competencies, conditions, and culture at Red Elementary. It will be important to capitalize on systems and practices already in place in District ES that can be shifted slightly to maximize support for educators to continue pushing their practice around SLOs. When collecting data, educators regularly reported using the CCSS to write their SLO; but, when planning for instruction related to the SLO, educators shared they worked to differentiate, but not always focused on, work aligned with the rigor of the standard being addressed within the SLO. Educators also shared they planned small group instruction, but again, there was a lack of discussion around how that instruction was planned and the types of differentiated support offered to students. Finally, educators shared how they progress monitored their targeted populations within the SLO; however, they but did not share how they used that progress monitoring to adapt instruction while still holding high expectations. When looking at the strategies and actions outlined in the proposed organizational plan, I outlined components of change
closely aligned with the instructional core. Forman et al. (2017) said, “The complex activities of teaching and learning rely on the interdependent actions of teachers and students working with content” (p. 7).

The organizational plan focuses around building capacity for educators to spend more time thinking about the work they are doing around planning and delivering instruction focused on the needs of the students, based on data that was collected when working with the students. Strategies and actions were developed that allow for more purposeful time be spent exploring the standards, understanding the level of rigor they represent, and then working with educators to plan instruction based on student assessment data and feedback, which allows for a more targeted approach with the learning taking place. Essentially, building the competency of educators around the instructional core in order to impact student learning effectively, efficiently, and consistently throughout time.

Policy Advocacy

District ES has a clear policy written for utilizing SLOs as a component of the teacher evaluation system. This policy is in alignment with the recommendations from the ISBE as part of PERA. I suggest an amendment to the process of writing and reflecting on the SLO in order to build in more touch points with supporting instructional planning and delivery, progress monitoring, and reflection so it aligns with the high expectations necessary for students to meet the goals put forth in the CCSS. By creating an opportunity for a midpoint reflection check-in with the educators and the administrator, an opportunity exists to continue a laser focus on the learning being done by the students, measure the impact of the instructional planning and delivery, and
collaborate to focus on the student’s needs that may not be making gains. Doing this creates an opportunity to dig more into the CCSS and determine an alignment between the work and assessments the students are doing. The impact of addressing these policy changes refocuses the work on the instructional core and pushes educator practice to a space where a clear connection exists between the educator, content, and student—which is currently not entirely being implemented.

**Leadership Lessons**

This entire process has been a learning experience for me, and one that reinforces the need to allow time and space for action research for all educators. Efron and Ravid (2019) stated that action research has been adopted by educational “. . . practitioners because they view it as a viable model for modifying, changing and improving the teaching-learning process. They feel it enhances their ability to grow professionally, become self-evaluative, and take responsibility for their own practice” (p. 2). For me, the entire process of identifying a problem or question around work being executed in the system I work in, gathering data, uncovering themes and patterns, and then working to improve upon the system to support student learning has been invaluable for several reasons:

1. Seeing the power and impact behind working through a very clear change management plan to make necessary revisions to practices and systems currently in place

2. Personally reflecting and determining if the work I am doing is based on making technical changes or adaptive changes.
3. Learning the importance of modeling this work myself in order to support the educators I work with when asking them to also make a change in their own practice.

By spending the time to really explore the 4 C’s that Wagner et al. (2006) shared, I have collected data; categorized and analyzed it; and reviewed the context, conditions, competencies, and culture at Red Elementary to create actions and strategies specifically targeted to those areas. Without time to explore the current state of being and then creating focused changes around identified needs, the change would not be implemented or sustainable.

Additionally, this process has helped develop my leadership lens around recognizing my own role within the change system and digging into the assumptions I make. According to Wagner et al. (2006), assumptions are “something you have constructed as a way of understanding and making sense of your world. It is a kind of rule or prediction about what will happen if you act or appear in a particular way” (p. 127). This has helped me clarify my own thinking about the need for change, my role in supporting change, and the contexts to consider when planning change. This directly connects to the next leadership lesson I learned: the importance of recognizing the difference between technical and adaptive changes and my own leadership tendencies.

Heifetz et al. (2009) explained that adaptive leadership is, “The practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (pp. 14–19). Technical leadership is focused around traditional solutions that do not address the changes necessary in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. This has been a
really important distinction to keep in mind while I worked through this research and used the lessons learned to begin impacting change in school administrator role. When thinking about SLOs in particular, but also my own leadership skills in general, I had to practice learning more about people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties, as well as my own, to develop a deeper understanding of myself and the people I lead. This represents an important shift for me as traditionally, I am a solutions-oriented person—if there is a problem, I propose an immediate solution and move forward.

Adaptive leadership is really about focusing on alternative solutions, exploring new ideas and ways of doing things, and devising solutions in collaborative ways that allow for maximum change and impact. By using the 4 C’s and thinking about the different strategies and actions that can be implemented to impact change within the system around SLOs, I learned to think through things collaboratively and approach them from more of an information-seeking perspective versus having a predetermined solution. When I apply this to SLOs, it has allowed for a deeper understanding of how educators feel about establishing SLOs, finding out what next edges of growth educators personally identify, and partnering with educators to provide them with the support and resources needed that aligns with the changes data shows needs to happen. It has been transformative to how I approach problems and solutions that extends far beyond SLOs.

This work has also reinforced and supported my belief regarding the importance of modeling this work myself in order to support the educators I work with when asking them to make change in their own practice. Kouzes and Posner (2012) explained that one major component of leadership involves setting the example, and leaders need to, “Take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they’re deeply committed to
the values and aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how you provide the evidence that you’re personally committed” (p. 74). *Actions speak louder than words* is a sentiment I hold as an educator. To me, this is exactly what Kouzes and Posnar (2012) meant when talking about setting the example. I realized the importance of modeling my own SLO process while working on this research, which I also have to participate in as an administrator. I spent a lot of time sharing the SLOs I created for myself, including them in conversations with educators when discussing their SLOs, and sharing regular progress-monitoring information with the people in my system. I worked to model some of the strategies and actions I proposed within the To-Be framework in order to model the changes I was suggesting. I made sure to share my reflections around my SLO and the work I was doing with my research. The intentionality behind these steps would not have happened if I had not started this research—for that, I am thankful.

**Closing Thoughts**

This entire process began because I questioned the learning of the students and educators I support on a daily basis. Doing so led me through a journey of building my own leadership capacity while also planning for and enacting changes that support my students and educators. Student learning objectives are critical to supporting high-quality instruction and enforcing high expectations of students. Through this study, I developed a deeper understanding of the work that needs to happen—both within my own leadership abilities and for educator capacity—to ensure students are provided with the best instruction support and prepared to be future leaders.

My goal entailed enacting the strategies and actions proposed in the To-Be framework to better support the educators I work with and helping to shift policy with
District ES to ensure every educator can engage in a meaningful SLO process that supports their own professional growth—and most importantly, allows students to achieve the high expectations educators must hold for them and is integral to their success. As Nelson Mandela said, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mindset Network, 2003, speech). Now let us use that weapon to prepare our students to be the change our world needs.
REFERENCES


*Joint Committee Guidebook: Implementing the Student Growth Component in Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems.* Retrieved from,  


Appendix A: Informed Consent—Principal Form to Conduct Research at School

TO
Jessica Plaza

FROM
Peter Godard, Chief Officer

DATE:
July 30, 2018

Evanston/Skokie
SCHOOL DISTRICT 65

RE
Research Approval for Evaluating the Impact of SLOs on Educator’s Instructional Planning and Practice

Every Child, Every Day, Whatever it Takes

Your research proposal has been reviewed by Evanston/Skokie School District 65. We have determined that your proposal meets the guidelines set forth in our Board Policy on Research Studies (7.16). Specifically, we have determined that the research you proposed will not interfere with the District’s educational program, has educational benefits to students, protects participant confidentiality, and is consistent with the District’s strategic objectives.

Accordingly, I am pleased to offer you the opportunity to conduct research in District 65 for the period commencing upon execution of this agreement by both parties and terminating on September 1, 2020.

This memorandum of understanding summarizes the conditions of this approval. Failure to abide by the terms specified here will result in immediate termination of this agreement and revocation of approval to continue your research in District 65.

1. The scope of your research shall be limited to those data collection and analysis activities described in the proposal you submitted. No additional data collection or analysis may be conducted without express written consent from the District.

2. You must conduct your research according to the timeline originally proposed. If data collection activities are not completed by June 30, 2019, you must obtain written consent from the District to continue your research. Because your research may interfere with classroom instruction and/or school operations, the District reserves the right to deny a request for continuation for any reason.

3. All research must be conducted in compliance with district research guidelines as well as State and Federal laws or regulations regarding educational research including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. 1232g) and the Illinois School Student Records Act (ISSRA) (105 ILCS 10/1 et seq.).
5. You must obtain consent from research subjects as specified in your proposal. You must maintain written records of consent forms, and you must make those consent forms available for review or audit by District personnel upon request.

6. You must conduct your study in a manner that minimizes disruption to the daily operations of District schools, the work of District employees, and the studies of District students.

7. This memorandum of understanding pertains only to the collection and analysis of primary data. If your research proposal also includes sharing and analysis of secondary data maintained in the District's student or administrative records, you must separately enter into a data sharing agreement related for that data. The terms of that data sharing agreement supersede those in this memorandum of understanding as regards the sharing and analysis of those data.

8. Unless your participant consent forms specify otherwise, you must destroy data collected as part of this research study upon termination of this agreement. You must submit a certification in writing that this has occurred upon termination of the agreement.

9. You must conduct and report on the study in a manner that does not allow for identification or disclosure of individual participant identities. You must employ disclosure avoidance techniques to prevent disclosure of data collected and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research subjects. This includes, but is not limited to, redacting results for groups of fewer than 10 students.

10. By signing this memorandum, you acknowledge and certify that you have the capacity to restrict access to data collected as part of this study and to maintain the security of electronic records created as part of this study. You must develop, implement, maintain, and use appropriate administrative, technical and physical security measures to preserve confidentiality. By signing this memorandum, you also acknowledge and certify that the use of unsecured telecommunications, including the internet, to transmit data collect as part of this study is strictly prohibited. You must encrypt all data transmission related to this study. You further agree to report fully to the District within one day of discovery and breach of the data collected as part of this study.

11. Any dissemination or use of data collected for this study other than that outlined in your proposal without the express written authority of the School District is specifically prohibited.

12. You may not share the data collected as part of this study with anyone who is not a signatory to this memorandum without the express written permission of the District.

13. You must provide the District any and all research and other reports produced using information from the study before such research or other
reports are published or publicly released in any fashion. The School District shall have 30 days from the date of its receipt of the material to be released to review the material. No release may be made without the School District providing its approval in writing. If the School District does not provide any response within 30 days from receipt of the material to be released, you may release the material but must remove all reference to the School District and must provide a copy of the proposed publication without reference to the School District at least 5 business days prior to publication. If the School District demands it, you must include a rejoinder to be provided in writing by the School District in any material to be published publicly. You must provide a copy of a final draft and all final versions of any material published including or based on data shared or collected pursuant to this Agreement.

14. All media releases and public announcements relating to this memorandum shall be coordinated and approved in writing by the School District.

15. You may not assign your obligations under this memorandum, or any part of its interest in this memorandum, without prior written consent of the District. Any assignment made without such consent is null and void.

16. By signing this memorandum, you indicate assent to indemnify and hold the District harmless from and against any and all direct claims, losses, liabilities, damages, costs, and expenses (including reasonable attorneys' fees) arising out of your or your employee(s)' agent(s)', or representatives(s)' negligent or willful acts or omissions in performance of duties under this memorandum.

Your signature below designates agreement to these terms. Please return an original signed copy of this document to the address provided. You may only begin research activities when you receive a fully executed copy in return.

Peter B. Schofield
Chief Officer of Research, Accountability, and Data
1500 McDowell Avenue
Evanston, Illinois 60201
FOR DISTRICT 65:

Peter R. Godard
Chief Officer, Accountability, Equity, & Organizational Development

7/30/2018

(Date)

FOR Researcher:

{Signature}

{Printed Name}

{Title}

{Date}
Appendix B: Informed Consent—Teacher Form to Participate in Research at School

My name is Jessica Plaza, and I am a Ed.D student at National Louis University. I am asking you to participate in this study, “Evaluating the Impact of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) on an Educators Instructional Planning and Practices” occurring from August 201–December 2018. The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of student learning outcomes on an educators instructional planning and practices. This study will help researchers develop a deeper understanding of how student learning outcomes are used to help guide and inform an educators professional practice. This form outlines the purpose of the study and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

By signing below, you are providing consent to participate in a research project conducted by Jessica Plaza, doctoral student, at National Louis University, Chicago.

Please understand that the purpose of the study is to explore the process and impact of setting student learning outcomes on an educators instructional planning and practice. Participation in this study will include:

- 1 survey with questions
- 1 possible interview
  - Interviews will last up to 45 minutes and include approximately 10 questions to understand how teachers use their self-selected SLO to plan for instructional and their instructional delivery.
  - Interviews will be recorded and participants may view and have final approval on the content of interview transcripts.
- Jessica Plaza may take field notes during classroom observations and debriefing sessions to capture the instructional practices that are directly tied to the work around the student learning outcome the teacher created.
  - Participants may view field notes and have final approval on the content of field notes.

Your participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time without penalty or bias. Study results may be published or otherwise reported at conferences, and employed to inform student learning outcome processes and practices in District X. Participants’ identities will in no way be revealed (data will be reported anonymously and bear no identifiers that could connect data to individual participants). To ensure confidentiality the researcher will secure recordings, transcripts, and field notes in a locked cabinet in her home office. Only Jessica Plaza will have access to data.
There are no anticipated risks or benefits, no greater than that encountered in daily life. Furthermore, the information gained from this study could be useful to the teachers and administrators in District X, other schools, and school districts looking to reflect upon and refine the practice of creating and using student learning outcomes to guide instruction.

Upon request you may receive summary results from this study and copies of any publications that may occur. Please email the researcher, Jessica Plaza at jplaza1222@my.nl.edu to request results from this study.

In the event you have questions or require additional information, please contact the researcher, Jessica Plaza at jplaza@my.nl.edu or 630-222-1025.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that have not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Sandra Stringer or Dr. Harrington Gibson the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Review Board. Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Thank you for your consideration.

______________________________________________
Participant’s Signature                          Date

______________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature                           Date
Appendix C District ES SLO Handbooks

Key Terms and Concepts in this Section
1. Student Learning Objective (SLO) - A Student Learning Objective is not a single test or assessment; it is an organization and planning process that facilitates authentic goal-setting, progress monitoring, and analyzing student growth in authentic and meaningful ways.
   a. An SLO is a planning process and organizational tool (not just a product or result) that is:
      i. Student-centered (and not determined before you meet your students)
      ii. Differentiated (and is not one-size-fits-all)
      iii. Connected to curriculum (not a surprise to the student, teacher, or evaluator)
      iv. Growth-oriented (as opposed to achievement-oriented; growth comes first)
      v. Goals and aspirations (as opposed to fear of failure)

2. Steps in the SLO Process: Teacher and Evaluator Collaboration
   a. SLO Approval: The creation (teacher) and approval (evaluator) of the SLO and its component parts, including identification of learning objective, growth target, and assessment(s) used
      i. Guiding questions for the SLO approval process are included in the approval template included in the appendix of this handbook
      ii. Steps that can be taken to help increase the likelihood of approval
      iii. Evaluator approves SLO
      iv. If evaluator and educator are unable to agree on a SLO
         1. It is recommended that the educator and evaluator meet at least three times to attempt to find a resolution
         2. Educator is encouraged to reach out for support and consultation from a peer (grade level team members, mentor, member/specialist from that department) before completing the second or third meeting
         3. If there is no agreement after three meetings, seek help from your DEC Joint Evaluation Committee representatives and if still unresolved elevate to DEC President and District department chair/Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction
   b. SLO Revision: The process by which parts or all of the initially approved SLO can be revised and reviewed
   c. SLO Scoring: The assigning of a singular performance rating to the SLO

Component Parts of the SLO Process
1. Collecting Baseline Data - Using established data sources to identify individual student starting points in relation to an anticipated learning target or goal.
   a. Examples: Reading level, performance on a grade-level pre-assessment measure
   b. Primary consideration: Selecting a source of baseline data that has the potential to demonstrate growth over time for individual students
2. Defining Student Populations - The defined roster of students included in an SLO.
   a. Examples: Whole third grade class; bottom two quartiles in grade level subject area; all EL students on a caseload
   b. Primary consideration: Does sub-group align with school, district, and community goals? Is the population size large enough to provide reliable and valid results?
   c. Identifying Learning Goals - Identifying a targeted, long-term goal for advancing student learning by describing what students will be able to do at the end of a specified period of time aligned to appropriate learning standards.
3. Identifying and Using Assessments - Identifying and using methods to measure and monitor student learning and growth.
   a. Examples: See Appendix provided by C&I Department
   b. Primary consideration: Identify and develop assessments in collaboration with grade level and subject area colleagues that are approved by District ES.
4. Establishing and Monitoring Student Growth Targets - A specific, measurable, objective-aligned goal for a defined student population within an SLO that specifies a desired outcome(s) for the identified population.
   a. Examples: Targeted growth goals for Writing on Demand assessment for third grade, with different growth targets for different student groups
   b. Primary consideration: Is the growth target rigorous enough to extend throughout the time interval defined by the SLO? Is it realistic enough to provide the right level of challenge for the student population(s)?
Appendix D Interview Questions

1. When creating a SLO/setting a goal, I utilize preassessment data to identify an area of greatest need for my student?
2. When creating a SLO/setting a goal, the assessments I utilize align with the curriculum I am teaching (in any subject area)?
3. When creating a SLO/set a goal, I collaborate with my grade level/content area?
4. If I collaborate with my team, we create the same SLO/goal for all of our students?
5. If I collaborate with my team, we each create differentiated SLOs/goals for our students?
6. If the team has the same SLO/goal for students, we use this to plan for whole group and small group instruction as a team?
7. I utilize my SLO to plan for whole group instruction?
8. I utilize my SLO to plan for small group instruction?
9. Please share how you use your SLO to plan for instruction?
10. I progress monitor my SLO regularly?
11. When progress monitoring, I utilize the results to adjust my instructional plans for whole groups and/or small group teaching?
12. Please share how you adjust instructional plans once you have progress monitored your SLO?
13. Do you think establishing SLOs has changed your instructional planning?
14. Please share how SLOs have impacted your instructional planning?
15. Do you think establishing SLOs have impacted your instructional delivery?
16. Please share how establishing SLOs have impacted your instructional delivery?
17. Do you feel establishing SLOs have had a positive, negative, or no impact on your instructional planning and delivery?
18. Would you like to use SLOs/goal setting differently in the future to guide your instructional planning?
19. Would you like to use SLO’s/goal setting differently in the future to guide your instructional delivery?
20. Please share how you would like to use SLOs/goal setting differently for instructional planning/delivery?
## Appendix E: District ES Reflection Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsatisfactory (1)</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (2)</th>
<th>Proficient (3)</th>
<th>Excellent (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Educator:</td>
<td>The Educator:</td>
<td>The Educator:</td>
<td>The Educator:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Does not know if SLO goals were achieved</td>
<td>— Has a generally accurate impression of performance on SLO goals and effectiveness</td>
<td>— Makes an accurate assessment of performance on SLO goals and effectiveness</td>
<td>— Makes a thoughtful and accurate assessment of performance on SLO goals and the extent to which it achieved its instructional outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Profoundly misjudges SLO’s effectiveness</td>
<td>— Makes general suggestions on how an SLO could be improved and what next steps should be</td>
<td>— Can cite evidence to support the assessment</td>
<td>— Drawing on an extensive repertoire, offers specific alternative actions and explores probable success of future steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>— Has no suggestions for how an SLO could be improved and what the next steps should be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Appendix F: District ES SLO Results Rubric

#### Percentage of Students Meeting SLO Goal (70% Weight)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unsatisfactory (0–25%)</th>
<th>Needs Improvement (26–50%)</th>
<th>Proficient (51–75%)</th>
<th>Excellent (76–100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Improvement</td>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix G: SLO Data Results From Interviews and TalentEd

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning for Creation of SLO</th>
<th>Impact of SLO Process on Ss Achievement</th>
<th>Characteristics of Instruction Related to the SLO</th>
<th>Characteristics of Instructional Planning Related to the SLO</th>
<th>Characteristics of Reflection and/or Next Steps Related to the SLO?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly stated Common Core State Standards related to the SLO.</td>
<td>All SLOs were met by Ss based on established District ES SLO rubric.</td>
<td>Differentiated small group instruction for targeted students.</td>
<td>Utilization of progress monitoring to plan next steps.</td>
<td>Specific details about how educator will change instructional delivery for coming school year related to the established SLO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 15 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 26 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 25 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 28 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 11 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and/or mention of District ES prescribed curriculum and assessments to guide instruction.</td>
<td>Dedicated time for progress monitoring throughout SLO timeline.</td>
<td>Whole group instruction related to SLO.</td>
<td>Intentionally planned work for students to do at home connected to SLO.</td>
<td>Reflection on the types of activities provided to Ss related to SLO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 24 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 9 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 17 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 9 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade level expectations established by District ES.</td>
<td>Helped to determine foundational skills needed to be successful with SLO.</td>
<td>Utilization of Workshop model.</td>
<td>Collaborate and plan instruction with additional educational supports (EL, Rdg, Tutors, SpEd) for targeted populations. Mentioned 4 times</td>
<td>Reflection on how to differentiate for small groups or 1:1 support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 5 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 2 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 10 times</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentioned 5 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

119
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explicit review of baseline data to guide instruction and determine Ss subgroups for SLO.</th>
<th>Focused 1:1 support between educator and student.</th>
<th>Intentional planning around technology available to support learning related to the SLO.</th>
<th>Reflection on how to progress monitor for learning and utilize that information for planning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 42 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 10 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 8 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration with grade level and/or content area colleagues to create the SLO.</td>
<td>Ensure there was dedicated time within instruction focused specifically on targeted SLO.</td>
<td>Intentional incorporation of learning across content areas.</td>
<td>Self-identify resources educator needs to push their practice in the established SLO area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 13 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
<td>Mentioned 4 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of purposefully planned activities available to practice the same skill.</td>
<td>Built more trust in the curriculum and following it with fidelity.</td>
<td>Created more focus on supporting learners flexibly within the curriculum.</td>
<td>Mentioned 3 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentioned 5 times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentioned 4 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H: IAR Achievement Gap Results
### Appendix I: Strategies and Actions Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Actions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased differentiated learning opportunities</td>
<td>Learning more about what differentiation looks like</td>
<td>MTSS structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaching partnership (District ES coaches, partner with EL, SpEd teachers) to determine differentiation opportunities within the curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unit plans with identified differentiated spaces</td>
<td>GLM time to meet and discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MTSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>How goals are established</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How to make students responsible for their learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student role in the goal setting and accomplishment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearer understanding of Common Core State Standards</td>
<td>How do personal beliefs in goal setting impact the goals being established</td>
<td>Are the goals that we are writing focused around getting Ss to grade level or just supporting their growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| PD and coaching supports for building familiarity with CCSS and the coherence and rigor of the standards at each grade level | Instructional planning/delivery | Established planning time  
Established time to review progress monitoring of goals and plan next steps of instruction |