Initial Use of Student Learning Objectives in Ohio

IMPORTANCE
Ohio, along with several other states, has included the use of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as one of the components of Student Growth Measures to determine teacher effectiveness. For teachers of subject areas and grade levels where value-added measures and approved vendor assessments are not available, SLOs may be the only possible measure available for assessing student growth. Prior to this study, little was known about how Ohio’s local education agencies were developing and using SLOs for teacher evaluation purposes, and if and how SLO-generated data are being used for designing appropriate student-centered performance improvement plans.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this study was to examine the work of Ohio’s early adopter districts developing and using SLOs to assess the fidelity of SLO use, the utility of SLOs for improving student performance and measuring academic growth, and the use of SLOs in evaluating teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN
This study employs a mixed-methods design with qualitative data drawn from interviews, focus groups, and document analysis supplemented with quantitative analyses of a teacher survey and teacher ratings data drawn from Ohio’s electronic Teacher and Principal Evaluation System (eTPES). SLO use by early adopters was examined to identify:

1. Approaches/processes for developing and using SLOs
2. Assessments selected for use to measure SLOs
3. SLO approval and monitoring processes within districts
4. Resources accessed or developed to support SLO use
5. Districts efforts at calibrating quality and rigor of SLOs
6. Use of SLOs in evaluating teacher performance
7. Responses to SLO use by teachers and administrators
8. Initial school culture reactions to SLO guidance and use

DATA
Data were collected from 13 Ohio LEAs participating in Ohio’s Student Growth Measures (SGMs) pilot, 15 LEAs piloting extended testing for SGM, two community schools, and two non-RTTT LEAs for a total of 30 LEAs. SLOs-specific questions were included in individual and focus group interviews with administrators and teachers as part of planned data collection on the use of Student Growth Measures for teacher evaluation. Additional interviews were conducted via telephone and in person with two non-RTTT LEAs and two Community School sites. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo content analysis software.
Survey data regarding current experiences and perceptions of using SGMs for teacher evaluation were collected from 603 teachers in the 13 LEAs piloting SGMs. The survey asked teachers to indicate which Student Growth Measures were included in their evaluation for both last year and this year (VAA, Approved Vendor Assessments, Student Learning Objectives, Shared Attribution); and about their perceptions of the accuracy, fairness, and value in using student growth measures as a key component of teacher evaluation. In the coming months, teacher ratings reported to ODE through eTPES for 2013-2014 will be analyzed and compared for congruence across performance standards-based ratings and variance comparisons for teachers with SLOs versus teachers with value-added and/or vendor assessment data.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Analysis of data collected to date are in process. Interview data are being content analyzed for patterns of behavior and thematic insights related to SLO training, use of SLOs, district-level SLO approval processes/quality control efforts, responses to SLO guidance and use, impacts on school culture, and SLO policy revision experiences of LEAs. Pervasive patterns revealed through initial analysis of interview data suggest: 1) SLO training was not uniform across the state; teachers reported receiving differing messages depending upon the session attended; 2) Assessments used for SLOs varied widely across grade levels, buildings and districts, including parts of vendor assessments, district short cycle assessments, and team created pre and post tests; 3) SLO processes were reported to be excessively time-consuming regardless of how well planned their rollout and implementation; 4) SLO processes were far more challenging to manage for semester or quarter courses due to the limited time available to complete the pre-test, teach, post-test cycle; and 5) SLO implementation was hampered by a number of concurrent changes, especially common core, piloting new standardized tests, and implementing the new Ohio Teacher and Principal Evaluation Systems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The examination of the work of Ohio’s early adopter districts in developing and using SLOs will enable policy makers to assess the fidelity of SLO use, the utility of SLOs for improving student performance and measuring academic growth, and the challenges and benefits of using SLOs to evaluate teachers.

Suggested Citation