STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES: A RHODE ISLAND CASE STUDY

A thesis presented

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Abstract
As Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) are being used more to evaluate teachers, the need for research on their implementation and impact on student learning is also growing. The researcher used a case study to ask the following questions based on implementation during the 2012-2013 school year, the first full year of implementation of SLOs in Rhode Island: 1) How did the setting and ongoing monitoring of SLOs impact teachers’ practice, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators? 2) What is the most challenging aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators? 3) What is the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators? Ten participants shared their views on the process and provided their perspective on teacher practice and if SLOs were viewed as successful or challenging as a new initiative. The conclusions of this study help to fill a gap in the literature regarding the teacher experience with SLOs, suggesting that while educators support the end goals of SLOs communicated by the state, they identify key issues with implementation such as flawed communication between district and teachers. District and school leaders may benefit from using the research to inform their own implementation procedures, potentially to mitigate challenges and align the purpose of SLOs with intended results.

Keywords: Student Learning Objectives, SLO, Teacher Evaluation, Rhode Island Department of Education, RIDE
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Chapter I: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

With parents, educators and legislators turning towards teacher evaluation in public education, a heightened level of interest has been directed towards the most effective ways to assess student learning. States, such as Rhode Island, have been engulfed in dialogue around how to include student learning within an evaluation system for teachers. Rightfully so, the dialogue has focused on how students are assessed and the best way to capture students’ learning in a formal evaluation process. Most often, teachers’ demonstration of their practice and responsibilities as educators are part of their professional evaluations, but the inclusion of student learning as the third component of an evaluation system has sparked the need to create a formalized process in which student achievement is tied to teacher evaluations.

The most commonly used measure of student achievement is standardized state-wide tests. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) acknowledge that test scores and other student assessments are the most commonly used instruments of educational accountability (p.102). Fratt (2005) states that “assessment has become a valuable instrument in the K-12 educators’ toolbox, proving its merit by allowing teachers to identify students’ specific learning needs (p. 47).” Although test scores are important and provide a certain level of data about a student, the standardized test is only a snapshot of a student’s knowledge. Test scores alone do not take into account the need for different modalities as a display of knowledge. Many state leaders recognize that it is important to think beyond the traditional paper-pencil test to assess student learning. Students are diverse and are not categorized as being standardized, so they should have the opportunity to display their knowledge in ways that are as diverse as they are. However,
creating and implementing systems that balance the need for accountability and objective
assessment with recognition of students’ individual circumstances, ways of learning and
demonstrating knowledge, has been a significant challenge. Assessments can come in a variety
of forms and according to Cope (1996), “Nontraditional forms of assessments, such as
demonstrations, projects and portfolios, offer a wide array of possibilities for authentic
assessment” (p. 3) and require more than paper and pencil or question and answer opportunities
to display knowledge.

Research suggests a promising approach in Student Learning Objectives (SLOs), which
are measurements of academic progress set in advance by educators for a group of students they
will teach for an interval of time. SLOs include a specific measure of growth that can be
demonstrated at the end of that period and can be tied to teacher performance. Ideally they
include prior data for benchmarking student performance as part of a cohort of similarly
performing students. Slotnik, et. al. (2013) states that SLOs are grounded in classroom practice
and because of that they can reveal where assessment practices are ineffective (p. 33). Slotnik,
et. al. (2013) also writes that “SLOs get better results than conventional instructional objectives
because they are developed and implemented through a more thoughtful, evidence-based process
with a more selective use of teaching and assessment practices” (Slotnik, et. al. 2013, p. 30).
Slotnik et. al. (2013) also goes on to mention that SLOs improve the quality of and increases the
teacher’s usage of multiple forms of measurement.

Significance of the Problem

SLOs are beginning to show an increased appearance in school districts across the
country as a way to support and evaluate teachers. Very little is known about SLOs, and yet they
are being used as a measure of teacher evaluation systems. Due to the fact that teacher
evaluations impact human capital decisions, there is a need for more research about SLOs and their impact on the instructional practices of teachers and student learning. The researcher hopes to contribute to the field of education by documenting the process that Rhode Island has taken to ensure that all educators are accountable for student learning and that all students have the opportunity to make academic progress. More specifically, the researcher hopes, by examining the implementation process in Rhode Island, to provide the field with knowledge gained from Rhode Island’s educators throughout this process. As district and state leaders seek out the right assessments and processes for monitoring student growth and assessing teacher performance, they may build on what Rhode Island has learned to benefit students and educator practice in their own states.

Rhode Island has been at the forefront in regards to SLOs and has garnered warranted attention for its educators’ efforts to set the stage for excellence for all students. Most notable is their effort to ensure that through the SLO process all educators are cognizant of the fact that students with disabilities, English Language Learners, and general education students are all equal in the quest for academic excellence and rigor, by ensuring that they are all moving toward attainment of a common objective. In order to measure student learning, in 2010-2011 RIDE initiated the beginning of an implementation process of the SLO as part of a new teacher assessment system that included other measures of performance such as classroom observations and meetings with teacher teams and evaluators throughout the year. In the first year, a sample of schools voluntarily participated as pilot districts for the evaluation system. They provided feedback to state leaders before the school year 2011-2012, a year of gradual implementation in which all districts were required to use the SLO, still without stakes attached for teacher performance evaluations. The state continued to seek feedback from individual schools and
teachers, while various districts worked to collect feedback from union leadership during the process. Beginning in the third year of implementation, 2012-2013, all educators throughout the state were required to set SLOs as one component of their evaluation. SLOs were to be specific and measurable. Trainings emphasized that SLOs should be both rigorous and attainable, meant to ensure that all students are challenged in an academic setting and have the opportunity to experience success while being pushed to new academic achievements.

As state leaders emphasized during implementation, an SLO is meant to be more than just a written statement, but a vehicle used to drive instruction and determine how levels of academic attainment will be measured within an interval of instruction. The SLO process in Rhode Island has significance not only for further improvement within the state but for other states implementing the SLO, as the requirement that all educators create SLOs could ensure that learning opportunities have less of a focus on accomplishing rudimentary tasks, but more of a focus on understanding and applying concepts (RIDE, 2012, pg. 29).

The researcher’s purpose for this case study is to provide a deeper understanding of SLOs and their academic implications to the field of education and use the data collected to determine recommendations for other states and districts that are embarking on implementing a student learning objectives process and to determine the resources needed for supporting local school districts. Setting SLOs allows educators to sculpt learning opportunities for students with clear direction and intention. The idea of creating objectives to guide student learning may not be new to the field of education, however the development of a uniformed process to setting and measuring student learning in tested and non-tested grades and subjects could aid in shifting professional and instructional practice. The stage can be set for purposeful instruction by shifting the practice of objective setting to include a clear understanding of the priority of content.
that is to be taught. The content is required to have a clear alignment to the Common Core State Standards or national standards being implemented in various stages across the country.

During implementation and continuing beyond 2012-2013, in setting SLOs educators are guided on what is required for standards of rigor and the evidence necessary to show student progress. The rigor of the academic target set for students at the beginning of the learning interval should be differentiated to account for all students while recognizing that students within a classroom or course do not enter at the same level. The quality of evidence used to measure attainment of the SLO should be appropriate in its ability to assess the learning that has taken place (RIDE, 2012, pg. 35). Educators are held accountable for students learning by monitoring progress throughout the year, and then analyzing the results of the data that has been collected in order for the objectives to be scored by their evaluator at the end of the academic year to determine, ultimately, if the objectives set were actually met. As Rhode Island highlights content or material taught, targets for learning set, and evidence used to show growth, in light of the challenges states face in measuring teacher impact, this case study could assist in shifting educational philosophies and practices about how student learning should be measured.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

The practical goals of this case study are to gain insight into the implementation of SLOs at the district level and to share the data gathered from the study with educators and leaders in the pursuit of effective ways to measure student learning and evaluate teacher practice. The intellectual goals of this qualitative study are to gain an understanding of the challenges and successes of implementing a uniformed SLO process and to understand in what ways the process has made an impact on teacher practice.
**Research Questions**

There is a void of information in the current literature outlining a uniformed process for creating and measuring Student Learning Objectives in the K-12 academic setting. Overall, the implementation of the SLO in Rhode Island generated questions around what impact SLOs may have on teaching practice as well as the challenges and successes of implementing a state-mandated process that measures student learning. The following research questions were created to help fill in the gap:

1. How does the setting and ongoing monitoring of SLOs impact teachers’ practice, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?

2. What was the most challenging aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?

3. What was the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?

**Organization**

The remainder of this doctoral thesis will be organized into the following sections: theoretical framework, literature review, research design, methodology, and conclusion. The theoretical framework will focus on John Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory and how it can assist in moving towards deep and intentional learning opportunities in the Pre-K-12 academic setting as defined by clear learning objectives that have been set for students by their teacher (Mezirow, 2000). Following the theoretical framework, the literature review will provide a review of literature and research on the use of assessments and learning objectives. The methodology section will present the design of the case study, including the identification of participants, the research questions, as well as data collection and data analysis methods.
Finally, the researcher will tie together the information from the literature review to support the reasoning behind the development of this case study as a way to answer the research questions.


Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory (2000) will be used as the theoretical framework to analyze the need for constructing and implementing learning objectives for Pre-K-12 students. Mezirow refers to Transformative Learning Theory as an adult education based theory that looks at “deep learning,” not just content or process learning. The application of this theory will assist in bridging the gap between learning objectives as a broad concept for learning in any field to narrowing the focus on the deep learning opportunities that can take place in the Pre-K-12 academic setting as defined by clear learning objectives that have been set for students by their teacher. In order for this level of transformation to occur in the classroom setting, teachers need to have a tight grasp on the specific content that they teach and the content standards. This theory will also serve as an analytical lens for which teachers can create SLOs for their students and districts can ensure SLO processes that focus on growth. It also serves as an apt lens for ensuring that SLOs and their implementation respond to the problems described above: they provide needed specific and objective measurements while also responding to students and teachers with individual needs and circumstances.

Through the transformation of learning, teachers develop their knowledge of the SLO process as mapped out by RIDE. The idea of teachers providing students with learning opportunities that provide a breadth and depth of knowledge runs seamlessly through Mezirow’s theory. Students digest information and begin to nurture their ability to apply the information that has become a new awareness to their lives and the world around them. The application of
this knowledge could be done through various modes of assessments and higher order questioning. As students will need more advanced skills than ever upon leaving their school systems, school districts should ensure that students do not just provide teachers with simple and recited answers. Systems and schools should be set up to effectively challenge students and allow them opportunities to demonstrate and apply their knowledge in more than one way. The application of knowledge innately transforms a student from one who merely receives and deposits information to a student who takes part in the information sharing and is active in the opportunity for the “deep learning” that Mezirow describes. The SLO serves as a process to assist the teacher in providing the focus for what the students are to learn under such a framework and a platform to identify the appropriate measures for learning it.

**Output Over Input: SLO as Alternative to “Banking Theory” of Learning**

Taylor (1998) supports Mezirow’s belief that too much emphasis has been placed on the role of the teacher as the person who inputs knowledge at the expense of the person who is a participant in the learning by not clearly measuring the depth of knowledge. Through RIDE’s SLO process, the focus is on the outcome and not the inputs. The SLO serves as a living document that is not set at the beginning of the year and then laid by the wayside until the end of the year. The SLO is used as a vehicle for ongoing monitoring to allow teachers to adjust their instruction as they continuously rely on the evidence that they collect to determine if a student is making progress. The focus is placed on the mastery of or progress toward a specific standard as measured by the level of knowledge that a student has attained. This allows for the primary focus to be on outputs rather than inputs, on what students learned and how they learned instead of on the teacher’s “input” into the student for memorization or regurgitation back to the teacher.
Paulo Freire (1970) referred to traditional education in the past as “banking.” The teacher was in charge of “depositing” information and was solely responsible for the inputs received by students, and students were heavily reliant on teachers for their experience that was predominately rote in nature. Education has evolved since then, and one would hope that educators are developing classroom settings that allow students access to experiential learning opportunities that meet the needs of all learners by creating learning objectives that are more focused on outcomes rather than inputs.

**Learning As “Disorienting Dilemma”**

Mezirow’s framework as applied to the Pre-K-12 academic setting can also serve to display academic transformation through a new lens. This new view could allow for the education community as a whole to broaden the scope in which students are allowed to dive deep into the pool of knowledge through implementing a state-wide and explicit change. Poutiatine (2010) identifies with Mezirow (2000) in the sense that the process of transformative change begins with a disorienting dilemma or experience. A disorienting dilemma could simply be a shift in point of view as new information is being received. The SLO is meant to incite such shifts by asking teachers to revisit goals and progress toward them throughout the year, ultimately growing their practice to better guide students toward important learning objectives. Poutiatine (2010) states “disorienting dilemmas can be born out of new information or new behavior” (p. 194). Once individuals receive new information they make the choice to work through a transformation process in order to work toward the integration of what is new. An idea could be disorienting in the fact that it brings about a reason in which one must act upon change or alter ones thinking. For example, a teacher could give an assessment and after analysis of the data could determine that a large number of students did not master the standard to a degree that
he/she thought based on previous classroom question and answering. The data serves as new information to the teacher and brings about a reason to act upon a change. The teacher could take the information and determine what students would benefit from a mini-lesson to bridge the gap that has taken place in learning.

The aforementioned example could be considered a disorienting dilemma or experience that would now require change in instructional practices or questioning techniques. If an educator realizes that something is wrong or inappropriate it would be to the detriment of the students to disregard the new information and deny a need for re-design and implementation. The SLO process builds in the opportunity for ongoing adaptation and adjustments based on data to drive instruction and measure student learning. The applied change could transform the way the teacher teaches and how students internalize and then apply information. Having a clear process for learning and monitoring through assessment along the way instead of assessing predominately at the end of a unit or course, could allow for a continuous outlook on student performance.

Brookfield (2000) states, “the act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves a fundamental questioning or reordering of how one thinks or acts” (p.139). In the case of SLOs, the reordering of thinking is what will hopefully drive educators to transform their instructional practice and provide opportunities among colleagues, especially within similar subjects and grade levels, to plan and develop common assessments for students. The SLO promotes the opportunity for teachers to create a roadmap for learning. It serves as a self-governing process with accountability tied into the monitoring of student progress. This type of autonomy is supported by Mezirow (2000) who believes that “achieving a greater autonomy in thinking is a product of transformative learning” (p. 29). Because of the systematic changes to
teacher evaluations that are occurring now, regressing back to the status quo would disregard the forward movement districts and states have already achieved. Gone should be the days when teachers isolate themselves to the four walls of their classroom and function as a silo separate from the rest of the school community. Transformation around achievement could be born out of the collegial conversations that take place in regard to student learning and how learning is measured.

The structure and process of Transformative Learning Theory will serve as the framework for this research to support the implementation of a student learning objective process. Anderson and Anderson (2001) call attention to the fact that “transformation requires leaders to expand their worldviews and increase their awareness and skills” (p. 50). As educational leaders increase their knowledge on the benefits of professional transformation, they can in turn help their teachers through any process that may require change.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The researcher conducted a literature search and focused on learning objectives and assessments. The information to follow is the literature review that will inform the analysis of the case study research. The literature presented will first focus on an overview of assessment and learning objectives. Following the overview, the literature presented will focus on assessment for learning, choosing and creating assessments, and on learning objectives.

Overview: Origins and Purpose of Assessment and Learning Objectives

Shor and Freire (1987) state that education is political in nature regardless of whether or not the teacher and student are aware. Heron (1981) refers to “assessment [as] the most political of the educational processes: it is the area where issues of power are the most at stake” (p. 63). Shor (1993) refers to the role of politics in education as being influential to the concepts that teachers discuss and the types of assessments that are used. One could believe that teachers have been assessing students’ learning since the days of the one room school house. However, the manner and degree in which students are assessed and why they are assessed has evolved over time.

Stiggins (2005) states that “we assess for two reasons: to inform instructional decisions and to motivate students to try to learn” (pg. 1). Data-based instructional decisions could be made to determine how to adjust instruction or to determine the supports needed for a student after careful analysis of student assessment data. Appropriate decision making based on assessment analysis could ensure that data based decisions are used to meet all student needs. Making students aware of their performance on assessments and providing feedback on how they can improve in their academic performance by focusing on learning targets or goals could serve as a way to motivate student progress through a specific focus. Provided focus is supported by
Moss, Brookhart, and Long (2011) who express the importance of students knowing what they are supposed to be learning and the importance of not allowing students to “fly blind.” Keeping students on the correct course towards achievement will hopefully increase all students’ learning in order to move all students forward. Marrying the concept of assessments and learning goals serves as a mode to find out where students are in order to get them where they are going by setting appropriate and measurable academic goals (RIDE, 2012, p. 35). Lachlan-Hache, Cushing, and Bivona (2012) suggest that student learning objectives “promote conversations between educators and their evaluators around student results, which can ultimately foster improved teaching practice and student learning” (p.1). Setting an academic goal and monitoring the on-going progress through quality assessments can lead to increased student achievement. Assessing students along the way could ensure that students are moving along the correct path and serve as notification when there is a need for course correction. The remainder of the literature review will explore assessment for learning, the choosing and creation of assessments and learning objectives.

**Role of Assessments in Promoting Learning**

According to Stiggins (2005), assessing learning as a practice can increase student achievement and promote the utilization of assessments for the purpose of student learning. Assessments can serve as a vital source to inform the progress that students are making toward meeting academic standards. They inform teachers as to how well they are teaching and how well students are performing. Assessment for learning is continuous and occurs while learning is taking place so that there is time to use the data from the assessment to be helpful (Stiggins, 2005, pg. 2). Stiggins and Defour (2009) also support the aforementioned concept by mentioning that assessments must provide an answer about where a student is located in his or her learning,
not only once a year or every few weeks, but continuously while the learning is happening (p. 641). Cope mentions that assessing student learning in a fair and accurate manner is no simple task (1996). Cope (1996) further goes on to share that with “more emphasis being placed on student performance and teacher accountability, measurement, and assessment are becoming increasingly important” (p.1).

There has been a conceptual shift in the usage of assessments. According to Olson (2003), assessments drive instruction, but assessments often lack the primary goal of guiding instructional decisions. Stiggins (2005) supports Olson by suggesting that assessments for learning acknowledge the importance of the instructional decisions made by students and their teachers working as a team (p. 1). Sanford and Reeves (2005) suggest that “in many instances, the test is not an assessment that guides instructional decisions; it is, instead, just another assignment that will become a grade in the gradebook (p. 18). As it is important for students to get good grades, it is just as important for students to understand what is being assessed and how they are being assessed in order to get the grade that they have earned. Assessment of learning has been defined as “the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there” (Assessment Reform Group, 2002). The utilization of assessments for the purpose of learning is the overarching goal when it comes to increasing student achievement through determining appropriate instruction and making instruction-based decisions.

Sanford and Reeves (2005) describe the “fundamental truth in effective teaching is that assessment strategies, both formal and informal, must help the teacher determine the most appropriate instruction, in addition to assessing progress (p. 18).” Assessments can serve as a way to show whether students are being appropriately challenged. The idea that “educators must
sense what high challenge and high support means for a specific group of students and offer both to help create a maximally challenging but safe learning environment” (Fleischer, p. 153) aligns with RIDE’s purpose of ensuring that students are meeting rigorous targets and are getting the supports that are needed to allow them to be successful academically. Part of a successful academic experience is allowing students to be active within their own learning experiences rather than sitting on the sidelines waiting for information to be dispensed to them.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) define active learning as more than a spectator sport, as students do not learn by sitting in class and listening to a teacher, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. Simply allowing students to parrot answers as an assessment of knowledge could stifle the learning process. Marzano (2000) defines assessment as “a vehicle for gathering information about students’ achievement or behavior” (p. 12). Rote measures of assessing can lead one to the conclusion that a student is successful at repeating facts, but they don’t necessarily determine whether a student can apply those facts. Marzano (2000) refers to responsible assessment as being evaluative, reflective and supportive. Assessments according to Marzano should provide an opportunity to determine how close to or how far away a student is from a specific standard; help both the teacher and the student to see how the student thinks; and take place in contexts where the teacher can coach and instruct the student (Marzano, 2001, p.2). Educators can stand resolute in the quest to provide meaningful experiences by creating authentic opportunities for all students to demonstrate their knowledge.

Assessments should be authentic and meaningful as “assessment is needed to appraise student progress, to provide guidance and motivation for learning, and to identify areas where improvements in either instruction or the program are necessary” (Cope, 1996, p. 2). Stiggins and DeFour (2009) break down the usage of assessments into three different levels. The first
level is classroom assessments. Classroom assessments provide information for students, teachers, and parents as to what comes next in the learning process along with continuous evidence about a student’s location in the learning progression (p. 641). The second level is school based assessments. At the school level, assessments serve as evidence as to how classrooms are comparable. This information could be used to reveal whether students are mastering standards (Stiggins & DeFour, 2009). The final level is the district level. On a district level, the data gathered from assessments provide members of central office with summaries of whether students are meeting required standards and provides an opportunity to view student learning performance by school (Stiggins & DeFour). Overall, Stiggins & DeFour have identified assessments as productive when they are designed in concept with clear learning targets, a commitment to standards-based instruction, high quality assessments, and effective communication. It is ideal to provide clarity as to what is expected of students and to provide students with information as based on the assessment and for teachers to adjust practice as needed (p. 643).

**Choosing and Creating Assessments**

In using assessments for the purpose of learning it is also important to create and choose the most appropriate assessments to measure learning. Assessment literacy among teachers plays a vital role in ensuring that proper assessments are chosen and/or created. Stanford and Reeves (2005) highlights that “The paper and pencil assessments used for today’s learners are often not relevant to the content being taught” (p. 18). Part of creating or choosing appropriate assessments is being clear about what learning needs to be assessed and the best way that it should be assessed.
According to Stiggins and Dufour (2009), common assessments that are created by teams of teachers who teach the same course or grade level represent a powerful tool in effective assessment. The same outlook could be attributed to teachers collaborating to choose non-teacher created assessments. The power is in the collaboration and measurement of student learning in a comparable way. Common assessments can serve as a way for teachers to pool their collective wisdom in making sound instructional decisions based on results (Stiggins & DeFour, 2009, p. 643). Their collective expertise can contribute to clarity of learning targets, as “before a team can develop a common assessment, members must first clarify the specific knowledge and understanding, reasoning proficiencies, performance skills, and product development capabilities each student is to master” (Stiggins & DeFour, 2009, p. 644). Lachlan-Hache, et. al (2012) supports this idea and the use of SLOs by suggesting that “SLO development supports educators in considering what average growth means in their classrooms, while asking them to think critically about setting high expectations for their students” (p. 2).

Teachers should work together to create common objectives and assessments; but Slotnik, et. al. (2013) adds that SLOs created by teacher teams should ensure that the growth expectations are set specifically for an individual teacher’s classroom based on baseline data and pre-assessments (p.55). He also states that although teachers may choose “to collaborate with their colleagues in developing objectives...they are accountable as individuals for the outcomes” (Slotnik, et. al. 2013, p. 55). Working together to identify what growth looks like and develop a common vision can assist teachers in their quest to increase student performance.

Having an understanding of standards and a collective common vision can allow for assessments to be aligned to deep and meaningful opportunities for students to be engulfed in big-picture learning. Wiggins and McTighe (2011) suggest that connected, big-picture learning
experiences tend to foster a better understanding of content than disjointed lesson plans that are activity-based. They also assert that “long-term achievement gains are more likely when teachers teach for understanding of transferable concepts and processes while giving learners multiple opportunities to apply their learning in meaningful contexts” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011, p. 4), and these multiple opportunities are better as quality-based, rather than volume-based. Along the same vein, Cullen and Harris (2009) categorize “assessments as the single-most important gauge of learning that drives the educational process and the most effective means of implementing institutional change” (p.115).

Willink and Jacobs (2012) refer to assessment as being critical to education as a means for change. Assessments are how educators are held accountable for the amount of knowledge a student has gained and how learning is measured. “Educators committed to transformation benefit from engaging assessment because of its powerful influences on students, teaching and learning and on educational institutions (p.146).” “Linking assessment with instruction enables teachers to better help students meet learning objectives (Fratt, 2005, p. 48).” “Over time, the student masters progressive levels of prerequisite learning that accumulate mastery of the standard (Stiggins & DeFour, 2009, p. 641).” Shifting assessments so that there is a more concrete bond between assessments and instruction is a process that works in alignment with assisting students to meet their learning objectives.

A Gap in Research on Learning Objectives

There is a gap in research surrounding student learning objectives within a K-12 system. The empirical articles that do exist related to learning objectives focus on learning objectives in the health and business professions, with few articles on research in education. Wallace-Carr and Hardin (2010) have applied learning objectives to recreational sports and believe that
“intended outcomes must be written in a manner that is measurable if they are going to be fully assessed” (p. 140). Once a learning outcome has been written in a way that it can be measured then an assessment plan can be developed. Wallace-Carr and Hardin (2010) view learning outcomes as a way to “provide the field of recreational sports with its greatest opportunity to demonstrate the positive impact of student involvement in its activities” (p. 143). Within the field of education, the same argument made by Wallace-Carr and Hardin (2010) could be made in reference to learning objectives. Learning objectives for students could possibly serve as a way for students to demonstrate their levels of knowledge as measured by assessments within the K-12 academic setting.

According to Wittman-Price and Fasolka (2010), for many years learning objectives were considered an essential foundation of any educational endeavor. Within the health profession, nurses have been taught to start all educational or teaching/learning sessions by stating the objectives for the specific session. This is a practice that also happens in the K-12 setting, but it does not necessarily happen in a uniformed or systematic manner. This process provides a clear understanding of the purpose of the session and serves to clarify the teacher’s expectations. The learner’s changed behavior is evaluated after the completion of the session to demonstrate that learning took place (Wittman-Price & Fasolka 2010, p.233). The application of this practice to classroom practice would be to set learning objectives for not just a lesson but to have a clear identified set of learning objectives for an academic year.

Glennon (2006) identifies that the learning objective process also aligns with professional practice, where outcomes promote quality improvement. The use of learning objectives could expand beyond adult learning to student learning by applying the same concept within K-12 settings. The premise is to allow the objective to serve as the central focus for the student and to
redirect the teaching/learning process and bring about a closer link to the learner. Creating and approving learning objectives while focused on specific content and the learning process can allow for the classroom to transform into a setting where deep learning opportunities take place.

The transformation of the classroom could begin with a shift in focus by identifying the differences among learning goals and objectives, learning activities and learning targets. According to Marzano (2007), these two concepts are quite often confused. Marzano (2007) classifies a learning goal as a “statement of what students will know or be able to do” and a learning activity as “things students will do” (p. 17). This thinking by Marzano marries with the same outlook as framed by Cori Fata-Hartley (2011). Fata-Hartley (2011) notes that as a part of a college course, efforts are made to align classroom activities and assessments with learning objectives. She also highlights the importance of ensuring that the assessments that are used are well-aligned with learning objectives and the cognitive complexities of the learning activities that are chosen. Learning goals are more about the overall knowledge that a student is intended to gain over a period of time and is appropriate for a specified interval of instruction. In essence, the activities the educator chooses are the vehicle which helps move the students towards the attainment of the overall learning goals or objectives. Moss, et. al, (2011), views learning goals and objectives different from learning targets. A shared learning target according to Moss, et. al, (2011) “is a chunk of a particular content that students are to master” (p. 3). Learning objectives differ as they are more for the long haul and geared toward more than just knowing a chunk of a specified content. Cope (1996) views objectives as the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the student is to develop along the way toward mastery of a learning objective.

Pintrich and Schunk (2002) state learning objectives are the process for establishing a direction to guide learning. Slotnik, et. al (2013) also share in the same sentiment as “teachers
engage in precise instructional planning in order to gain better results with their students (p.29). Dean, et. al, (2012) write, “When teachers identify and communicate clear learning objectives, they send the message that there is a focus for the learning activities to come. This reassures students that there is a reason for learning and provides teachers with a focal point for planning instruction (p. 254).” Albritton, et. al. (2011) reports that “setting learning goals that are Specific and Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-based, and Time-bound” (p. 56) is the reason for “classroom teachers reporting that students who had never experienced success at school were now focused, engaged, motivated, and willing to keep trying to achieve their learning goals” (p. 58). Setting the stage from the beginning by identifying the end goal provides up front for the student the destination that they are trying to reach. The teacher serves as the tour guide for the learning that is to take place by identifying the stops they will take along the way of curriculum to their final destination which is the mastery of a specific standard.

In mastering or making progress towards a standard it is important to identify the appropriate amount of learning that can take place within an identified interval of instruction. Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone (2012) caution educators from setting learning objectives that are too broad or too narrow. The proper size of a learning objective ensures that an objective is not meaningless because it is too broad or limits learning because it is too narrow. In order to determine the proper grain size, an educator must be knowledgeable about the standards for their specific content area and be able to communicate standards and objectives.

Dean, et. al, (2012), argue that it is important to clearly communicate the learning objectives not only to students, but to parents as well. The communication should be free of jargon so that students and parents can be engaged in the learning process. Clearly communicating learning objectives to students allows them to have a vision of what they are to
attain. Learning objectives should be born out of the appropriate content that is to be taught but should not necessarily stand alone. Mager (1997) describes learning outcomes as blueprints; they provide the guide to teaching what is intended to be taught. Silberman (1998) suggests that learning outcomes are the “pillar of your program, not straightjackets” (p. 37). If learning objectives could be considered a roadmap for learning then one could argue there should be stops along the way to ensure that students are continuing the right path, and those stops along the way would be done in the form of formative and summative assessments. The use of formative and summative assessments aligns with the thinking that is outlined in James Stronge’s Qualities of an Effective Teacher. Stronge’s research suggests the tremendous emphasis that should be placed on knowing your students.

To date, it seems as though assessments and learning objectives have been a part of two separate conversations and the literature suggests that students would benefit from both being a part of the same conversation. Effective educators are knowledgeable of their students and how they perform best. It is not just important to have knowledge of assessments and how to use them but it is just as important to have a clear understanding as to how they pair well with the usage of learning objectives. It is for this reason that the researcher finds that it is imperative that the relationship between the two be explored. Knowing the academic make-up of students and how they perform as compared to their academic peers within the classroom is just the beginning. The gap in literature supports the fact that there is separation between the two entities. The researcher plans to bridge the gap through a case study approach by collecting evidence from the SLO process in Rhode Island and using the findings of the study to better inform the field on the linking of assessments to instruction as a part of a uniformed objective process in the setting of learning objectives.
Chapter III: Research Design

Case Study

A case study approach was chosen for this study as a way to investigate and provide insight into a real-life event (Yin, 2009) with potential consequences for K-12 education. This case study will be exploratory in nature as it will set out to answer a series of “what” questions on a contemporary issue in the field of education. Throughout the exploratory case study, data will be collected for analysis to determine what was learned through the implementation of the SLO process within a school district.

The real life event that will be captured is the implementation of the SLO process within a school district in Rhode Island. As described in Chapter One, in 2010-2011 RIDE initiated the beginning of an implementation process of the SLO as part of a new teacher evaluation system. Before full implementation in 2012-2013, a sample of schools participated without stakes attached for performance evaluations, and they provided feedback for state leaders working to improve the process before full implementation across the state. For the sake of anonymity this particular district will be referred to as the “Ocean State School District” (OSSD). The OSSD was chosen because the district had identified three individuals to serve as district evaluators (DEs) for the district; they were charged to support, review, and monitor the implementation of the SLO process in the district during the first full year of state-wide implementation in 2012-2013. This cohort received intensive training by RIDE staff and was chosen to assist in facilitating training to a number of evaluators throughout the state during the summer of 2012. Due to the training that they received and the training that they facilitated for others, their school district was the ideal focus for a case study and the DEs will be included in the study to provide their perspective.
The researcher is confident that using a case study approach to investigate the real life event of the implementation and impact of SLOs in one local school district was the best way to gain insight into the SLO process as it is currently being used in a district for teacher evaluation (Yin, 2009). The findings will highlight the participants in the sample and the role that they hold within their district. The researcher will provide findings by using the general research principle of triangulating data (Maxwell, 2008). Information will be shared first through a summation of responses, second through relevant themes based on participants’ words and finally through SLO samples that have been submitted to the study by the participants.

**Population and Sample**

The researcher conducted ten interviews of participants who were all employed by the OSSD during the 2012-2013 school year. The choice to use a small number of participants in the study aligns with Maxwell’s belief that qualitative researchers use small numbers when conducting a study (Maxwell, 2013). Participants were recruited through an email, and those who responded that they would be willing participants were used for the study. The recruitment email was sent to twenty-eight individuals across varying grade levels and subject areas. The researcher was successful in gathering a purposeful sampling of ten participants (Maxwell, 2008). These participants served the purpose of describing the impact that SLOs had on teacher practice as well and identifying the challenges and worthwhile aspects of the process in a phone interview.

Interviewing all participants took a total of one month. The researcher arranged a time that worked best for the participants and all participants were interviewed by phone once for approximately thirty minutes. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality. They were assured that their identity would not be shared with anyone in their
district or with other participants in the study. They were also assured that they would not be identified in any manner other than their assigned pseudonym when writing about the findings. Any participant who submitted an SLO sample to be included in the study will have his or her name and any other identifying information redacted or removed. The section on Research Findings of this thesis will share through a summation of participant interviews and a coding process the impact that SLOs had on teacher practice in a sample Rhode Island school district as well as the successes and challenges of the process.

**Rationale for Research Questions**

Three process-oriented questions drove this qualitative single-case study (Maxwell, 2005, p. 75). The questions allowed participants to reflect on their experience and allow the researcher to capture how implementing the process impacted teaching and learning overall throughout the course of the year. The research questions focused on the challenges and successes the teachers experienced when implementing the SLO process, seeking to identify how the process was implemented across the district and provide insight into how the district implemented the process according to the guidelines set by RIDE.

**Research Questions**

1. How does the setting and ongoing monitoring of SLOs impact teachers’ practice, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?

2. What was the most challenging aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?

3. What was the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers, principals and district evaluators?
Through the aforementioned questions, the researcher sought to discover the first-hand experiences of teachers when designing an SLO and implementing the SLO process within the classroom setting. The questions were designed to identify any successes and challenges of implementation so that teachers’ experiences within OSSD could serve as an opportunity for learning for other districts and agencies of education.

There are multiple challenges involved in implementing any district program or initiative, especially regarding systems linked to teacher evaluation. As in other states implementing new teacher evaluations including measurements of student achievement components, throughout Rhode Island there has been anxiety surrounding the implementation of the new evaluation system. Specific levels of uncertainty were around the student learning objective process, which may be perceived at the school level as a “top-down” reform coming from state-level administrators. Hence when it comes to the need for overall buy-in of a new initiative to implement most effectively, the anxiety that teachers feel will likely lead to challenges with implementation in any state. Nevertheless, for Rhode Island, it is a state mandated requirement for all educators and this research sought to inform those who wish to maximize the effectiveness of implementation while accepting and mitigating the challenges.

**Methodology**

Conducting a qualitative research study within the district studied serves as a means to capture the challenges, successes, and all nuances of implementation. A qualitative study marries well with the reflective collection and interpretation of data that will need to take place in order to capture the spirit in which participants determine how implementation impacted and informed teaching and learning in their schools (Creswell, 2009, p. 175-176). A purposeful sampling as identified by Maxwell (2008) allows for a deliberate selection of participants in
order to gather important information that may not be able to be attained by other choices (p. 235).

In order to ensure a purposeful and robust sampling to gather meaningful data, the researcher included a curriculum coordinator and two district evaluators (DEs) as participants. The curriculum coordinator and DEs provided district-wide information as to how they organized training, provided support to district personnel and identified the challenges and successes they experienced during implementation. They were chosen in part because they would be able to speak to the challenges and successes encountered while supporting teachers through the process of setting SLOs. The curriculum coordinator and the two DEs in the district were a part of the study also because they were a pivotal component in receiving training from the state department of education, training their staff on the SLO process and ensuring process reliability and validity.

Just as the curriculum coordinator and DEs were paramount to understanding the implementation of the SLO process district-wide, it was just as important to interview teachers and principals. All participants had the opportunity to describe in individual interviews the process from their points of view. They also had the opportunity to share samples of their student learning objectives from the 2012-2013 school year if they chose to do so. The process of conducting interviews and reviews of SLOs provided insight into teachers’ understanding of the process and how their level of knowledge helped them to set SLOs.

**Site and Participants**

The design of this case study focused “on the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue” (Creswell 2009, p.175). The meaning was derived from participants’ views on setting of student learning objectives and the impact the process had on the learning that took
place in the classroom and on their on-going monitoring of student achievement. Teachers served as participants in the study in order to paint a clear picture across grade spans. Two DEs, three principals and the curriculum coordinator provided their outlook as to the district’s implementation of the SLO process. The choice of a small sample size is in accordance with Maxwell (2013), in that “qualitative researchers typically study a relatively small number of individuals or situations and preserve the individuality of each of these in their analyses, rather than collecting data from large samples and aggregating the data across individuals or situations” (p.30). Thus, also according to Maxwell (2008), they are able to understand how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur (pg. 221). This case study took a homogeneous and opportunistic approach to the sampling for this study.

**Data Collection**

Maxwell (2008) points out that “qualitative studies generally rely on the integration of data from a variety of methods and sources of information, a general principal known as triangulation.” (p. 236). In order to reduce the risk of unanticipated bias, data was collected in a variety of ways. First, data was collected in the way of an SLO form that included the priority of the SLO content teachers used, rigorous targets set by teachers, and quality pieces of evidence as determined by teachers or determined for teachers by administrators. Information was gathered by interviews, by note-taking and a review of objectives across grade levels and subject areas. Each interview was unable to be audio recorded by the researcher as it was initially intended due to a technical glitch. The timeline for collecting all data was the duration of one month.

**Data Analysis**
Following the summation of responses, the researcher identified themes from the study through a coding process. The researcher used Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) three phases of coding. The coding process began with open coding to develop categories based on participant responses. Once the categories were developed, axial coding identified the links in the properties of those codes and the participants’ words that were relevant to the theme in the specific open code. Finally, selective coding allowed the opportunity for the researcher to develop a theory. The researcher used the coding as a means to identify themes by using the participants’ actual words as identified by their accounting of their own experience in using the SLO process as it correlates with the research questions. Samples of student learning objectives that were written by teachers and approved by administrators were reviewed by the researcher “because of their overall value, documents play an explicit role in any data collection in doing case studies” (Yin, 2009, p. 103). These artifacts were made available by a teacher and administrator participant in the study.

Validity and Credibility

Some educators in Rhode Island expressed to RIDE and publicly during the implementation process the belief that initiatives tend to be implemented only to be changed the following year. This bias could skew the answers to questions, but the researcher asked that the participants focus on their implementation of the SLO process for the 2012-2013 academic school year. As a part of the research design, questions were developed to ensure consistent question content among the participants. All teachers were asked the same set of questions to probe the impact of the SLO on their practice. Questions for the curriculum coordinator, principals and the DEs centered on the structure and approach that was taken to implement the SLO process with fidelity as well as the support provided to teachers.
The interview format assisted the researcher in determining the applicability of any issues that arose during the SLO process that transferred across subject areas or grade levels. To provide neutrality to the study, the researcher triangulated the data collected to ensure that the study was not contaminated by bias. In an effort to be transparent and to ensure that the participants were not deceived, the researcher disclosed that she was the project leader of the Student Learning Objective component designed by RIDE. The researcher’s service as former employee of the Rhode Island Department of Education could have served as a risk to the study. In part to mitigate this risk, the researcher clarified to the individuals participating in the study that she was interviewing them in the role of a researcher and not a state employee representing the department of education.

Participants provided consent that allowed the researcher access to documents for review. The researcher had an expert from the field vet the questions to be used during interviews. This expert currently works for the American Institute for Research (AIR) and provides technical assistance to other state agencies, school districts, and/or organizations that are developing or currently using an SLO process. The vetting of questions helped to ensure that there were not any questions that may have promoted a bias by the researcher. After the researcher designed the questions for the interviews, she sent via email a set of questions for review by Lisa Lachlan-Hache and Ellen Cushing who continue to work with SLOs on a national level.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The rights and welfare of all participants in the study were protected and respected throughout the entire process, in part by providing them with an assurance of confidentiality. The participants who took part had the right to remove themselves from the interview portion of the data collection process at any time they deemed appropriate and for any reason they deemed
appropriate. Providing confidentiality allowed for the participants to not be placed in any undesirable position to which they could receive unwanted attention by participating in a study from colleagues or administrators.

As a part of this case study, the researcher reviewed SLOs that had been created and scored at the end of the 2012-2013 school year. The teachers who had set the SLOs remain confidential. Names of teachers are not shared in the study and the school from which the SLO sample was drawn also remains nameless under the OSSD pseudonym mentioned earlier. No students were interviewed or used as participants in this study. The researcher obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and followed all pre-determined parameters of data collection, analysis and reporting.
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

Introduction

Teacher evaluations increasingly incorporate student learning objectives (SLOs). In the current study, the researcher explored SLOs as they impact teacher practice and investigated the successes and challenges in regard to their use. This chapter includes the findings and results of the case study. Each participant in the study took part in an interview and gave his or her firsthand account of the SLO process. The researcher’s purpose was to use the data collected to document the process through the eyes of stakeholders in one Rhode Island school district, and to potentially inform other states and districts on the implementation of SLOs in classroom practice.

Study Context

State level context. The state of Rhode Island was in the midst of working on a new educator evaluation system when they applied for and then won the Race to the Top (RTTT) grant that was made available by the United Stated Department of Education in 2010. Part of the grant funds were used to support the development and implementation of a new evaluation system for educators to improve teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance. Of the three required components of the evaluation and support system as designed by RIDE, one required component was Student Learning. The student learning portion was comprised of a set of SLOs and the Rhode Island Growth Model. According to the RTTT application as completed by RIDE, funding would assist RIDE in its efforts to broaden the scope and timeline to hold all teachers and principals accountable for their impacts on student learning (RTTT Application, 2010, pg 163). To design and implement this work the department of education had an evaluation team of five people, which included the researcher of this study, who developed the
evaluation system and a separate team of three, also including the researcher, who developed the SLO process.

During the course of development, RIDE had to work to gain the trust of educators throughout the state as educators felt that this would be another fleeting initiative that they could just wait out. To build trust and promote the idea that the evaluation and support system would have staying power, the commissioner, Deborah Gist, visited schools and held forums to answer questions that were raised by educators and union representatives. During these meetings, a member of the evaluation team was present to capture notes and document areas of contention that were expressed by participants in the meeting. These notes were used to create “frequently asked questions” documents and used to help design training for state educators. RIDE did not want the system to collapse because it was too cumbersome and too time-consuming. Thus, RIDE representatives frequently listened to educators to help make adjustments where principals felt the system would be cumbersome. For example, the SLO process initially, was a process that was paper-based until the SLO team along with a vendor created an online system. RIDE also decided to make the first year that the system was in use a gradual implementation year to allow school districts the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the new system before it became fully implemented.

RIDE’s new educator evaluation and support model is based on system standards and has tied measures of student learning to educator evaluations. During the 2011-2012 school year, the state embarked on a wave of change by allowing districts to gradually implement the new evaluation, so that there was an opportunity to build capacity and have practical experience using the model before full implementation in the 2012-2013 school year.
One could argue that measuring student learning could be as simple as administering commercial standardized assessments in all tested and non-tested grades and in all subject areas to determine how well students have mastered a specific concept or skill. However, this K-12 educational practice could hinder the ability for some students to differentiate how they display their knowledge of an identified concept or skill. For some students, commercial assessments are best, but for other students, assessments such as: performance assessments, projects or portfolios are a better way to measure achievement. SLOs allow for a myriad of ways that a student could display their knowledge, as measurement tools could include purchased assessments, district or regionally produced assessments and common assessments designed by schools or teacher teams. Assessment is integral to teaching because it tells us what students know and are learning. RIDE has implemented a process that measures student learning by requiring that educators create SLOs, regardless of grade level or subject area and provides the opportunity for teachers to use multiple measures to capture academic achievement.

The idea of a statewide objective setting process was born out of a decision that was made to forgo additional commercial assessments and to focus, instead, on SLO methods of assessment. Implementation of the SLO process can assist in driving instruction and the measurement of learning while increasing alignment between identified district and school-level priorities, as well as classroom instructional practices. RIDE designed a uniform process that affords educators the opportunity to document the impact that they are making on students’ learning. The implementation of SLOs could serve as the catalyst for increasing student achievement, the foundation for selecting engaging learning activities, and the driver for selecting appropriate assessment measures.
As the third component of the Educator Evaluation and Support System in Rhode Island, the SLO process has received significant pushback from educators. As evidence, a petition was created by the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers (RIFT) to slow RIDE down from using SLOs as an evaluative measure. RIFT (2012) stated that “The RI Department of Education wants to use Student Learning Objectives to determine teacher effectiveness, but their SLO process is flawed.” The aforementioned statement was written within the petition as a way to rally teachers to speak out against the SLO process and to encourage RIDE to rethink their use of SLOs. RIFT also stated in the petition that “as it stands, the SLO component of teacher evaluations is unproven, inappropriate for judging teacher effectiveness and not yet ready for such high stakes.” Yet despite the challenges of implementing a uniform goal-setting process for teacher evaluation and the position taken by RIFT, the practice is growing and the focus on student learning is becoming more explicit.

RIDE identifies “student learning as the single most important indicator of educator effectiveness,” and has determined that “setting objectives for students’ learning is an effective instructional practice (RIDE, 2012, p. 29).” “Throughout the country, effective educators and leaders use academic goal-setting to ensure that every student is making progress (RIDE, 2012, p. 29).” So, “to that end, every teacher and building administrator in Rhode Island will be evaluated, in part, based upon their impact on student learning (RIDE, 2012, p. 29).” The SLO process as designed by RIDE, presents an opportunity for teachers to be empowered to decide how to best measure the learning of their specific population of students, while providing a consistent and uniformed process for all teachers across the state as the focus is on student outcomes for all educators. The shift is made from the teacher, their methods and their input to the students and their acquisition and application of knowledge to attain academic goals.
**District level context.** This study looked at the aforementioned mandate as designed by RIDE through the perspective of one local school district. This district was the Ocean State School District (OSSD, this name is a pseudonym and was used to protect confidentiality of the school district’s stakeholders) and is made up of one high school, one career and technical school, two middle schools, eight elementary schools and one early learning center. During the 2012-2013 school year the district and the city that the school district was located in underwent significant changes. The district was in search of a new superintendent as well as making budget changes that may have fueled anxiety among teachers about performance and job security. The city and school district had a huge deficit and a budget commission from the state took over the financial operations in November of 2012. There were huge cuts in programs like middle school sports and staff positions. The budget commission required that all positions only be filled with their permission and this also resulted in an increase in class size. As these changes were happening, an interim superintendent was at the helm and the district was also in the midst of implementing the state’s new educator evaluation and support system that included the use of SLOs. The district’s Assistant Superintendent served in the role of Superintendent and then left to become a principal in another district. He left due to the strains of the position as there was only one other leadership position filled by a curriculum director at central office. The district ended up having an interim Superintendent for most of the year and he complied, for the most part, with state regulations. However, he was not fully invested because his role was temporary and the district was in the process of searching for a permanent superintendent.

OSSD was the ideal district to use for this study because its district level evaluators had been extensively and directly trained by members of the RIDE evaluation team. The district level evaluators not only provided professional development opportunities for educators within their
own district, but they also served during the summer months as Evaluation Intermediary Support Providers (ISPs) on behalf of RIDE and provided professional development to educators from other districts in regard to the SLO process. The role of the ISPs was defined by RIDE in the RTTT application as individuals who will “work side-by-side with principals and other evaluators to conduct evaluations, calibrate decisions, and, most important, develop educator professional development plans based on the results of evaluation” (RTTT application, 2010, p. 163). Implementation of SLOs by the OSSD provided insight into how teachers used the process as a means to identify a need for an adjustment in teacher practice and the challenges and success of the process overall. Teachers began the process of setting SLOs by identifying the priority of the content that needed to be covered in their classrooms, setting appropriate and rigorous targets for learning, and identifying evidence that would accurately measure student learning. At the district level, the choice was made to set targets and choose assessments for teachers in math and reading across the board by grade level.

**School level context.** At the school level, administrators believed the process to be overwhelming as they were learning a new evaluation system for themselves and for their teachers at the same time that they were also implementing both systems. Administrators were provided with training over the summer and could rely on the assistance of district level evaluators and ISPs to assist them in the process but nonetheless found it to be a lot to help teachers write, revise when needed and approve SLOs for the school year. In addition, principals were often unclear on the process.

**How SLOs were implemented.** SLOs were initiated because RIDE wanted to do more than merely add more testing. The SLO team created a uniform SLO process that would be used to measure effectiveness. The SLO process was piloted in one school after a form was
developed. Initially, it was a paper-heavy process until the online system was designed by the SLO team and created by mylearningplan. Educators were then able to submit SLOs online and they could be viewed and approved by their evaluator.

The SLO team developed interactive training for Principals, Superintendents, and Curriculum Directors so that they were aware of the process and could assist teachers. During the summer academy of 2012, RIDE committed a full day taking administrators through what the process of SLOs would look like during the course of a year. Participants had the opportunity to review, develop feedback and score samples of SLOs while engaging in dialogue with their colleagues. Webinars were developed for teachers and a guidebook and sample SLOs were created. There was a sticking point for special education teachers as they felt that the process was unfair to them. For example, teachers shared that their roles, at times, required them to work with students across grade levels, in a co-teach environment or across classrooms of the same grade level. The variance of their roles made it difficult to capture their impact on student achievement. This feedback led to RIDE writing specific guidance for special education teachers in the guidebook to identify three different approaches to capturing student learning.

**Teachers’ resistance to SLOs.** Teachers started a petition to “SLOw ride down” because they claimed there was no research on its effectiveness and there was ambiguity in regard to how to set targets (http://slowridedown.com/). Moreover, there was confusion as to what constituted “meeting targets.” For example, RIDE used terms like “a few on either side of the target.” Participants in trainings often responded with “what is a few” as the term to be defined was left up to interpretation by individual districts. Teachers were upset because they felt the process was subjective and that there were no common assessments and this made the process seem unreliable to them.
Although there seemed to be compliance, at the school level it was hard for the state to manage implementation. Some of the steps the representatives at the state level took were as follows: they created workshops on how to write an SLO, created webinars, posted recorded webinars, assigned Intermediary Support Providers to schools to provide assistance, provided an educator evaluation mailbox so educators could send questions and get a response directly from the evaluation team. However, SLOs still have not been totally embraced. This is due to several factors. For example, some of the problems are as follows: there are no common assessments, the implementation was poorly coordinated, and the instructions were ambiguous.

Participants

Participants in the study were teachers, administrators and district evaluators (DEs). Of the ten participants, five were teachers, two were administrators and three were district evaluators. Their personal accounts of the SLO process assisted in the shaping of this study and provided the primary data. The researcher conducted ten interviews of participants who were all employed by the OSSD during the 2012-2013 school year. Participants were recruited through an email and those who responded that they would be willing participants were used for the study. The recruitment email was sent to twenty-eight individuals across varying grade levels and subject areas. The researcher was successful in gathering a purposeful sampling of participants (Maxwell, 2008). These participants served the purpose of identifying the impact that SLOs had on teacher practice as well as to identify the challenges and worthwhile aspects of the process through the process of a phone interview.
Answering the research questions. The data will show the impact that SLOs had on teacher practice as well as the successes and challenges of the process. In this section are quoted excerpts from participants’ answers to ten questions asked in each interview (See Appendix). For the purpose of this study, the researcher has organized the emerging themes and excerpted participant reflections according to the relevant research question they address.

Research Question 1. How Does the Setting and Ongoing Monitoring of SLOs Impact Teachers’ Practice, as Perceived by Teachers, Principals and District Evaluators?

Through an analysis of participant responses, the researcher has identified themes that align to research question 1. The following themes highlight the participants’ reflective point of view to the aforementioned research question: (1) SLOs brought about a greater collaboration among teachers; (2) SLOs helped with clarity of purpose, helped teachers stay on track, and aligned teaching with objectives; (3) SLOs facilitated on-going monitoring of student progress; (4) SLOs facilitated re-teaching; and (5) SLOs facilitated consistency within and among schools. Each theme is supported by direct quotes that were captured during the interview process.

SLOs brought about greater collaboration among teachers. According to all participants, the SLO process provided opportunities for teachers to come together and discuss student performance and academic goals. Consequently, this allowed teachers to constantly reassess and make themselves and students accountable while fostering collaboration. One teacher, Kesha, (the researcher identified participants with pseudonyms in order to protect confidentiality) agreed with the aforementioned point and also shared that a lot of dialogue happened with colleagues and forced teachers to come out of isolation to collaborate at both the school level and at the district level. The collaboration within schools and across schools provided teachers with the chance to look at data differently through collegial dialogue. This
sentiment was shared by Melissa who believed from her perspective as a teacher that looking at data differently helped to drive instruction and assess students’ current levels of performance.

One example of collaboration was highlighted by Maya, a classroom teacher, who shared that “two different schools came together to create common tasks and monitor progress of their specific grade level.” Other teachers in the study also shared that they collaborated with their colleagues to create common assessments while others worked together to ensure that they were focused on and covering the most important content. Many teachers in the study reported that collaboration helped to ensure that colleagues did not have to work in isolation and set the stage for conversations around student achievement. Conversely, Karen openly shared that as teacher collaboration is helpful however; some teachers in her school felt it was pushed on them.

Participants mentioned that the department analyzed data together and shared the changes that they noticed in student achievement. Karen also shared that “the SLO process, from the larger perspective, promoted the use of data to drive instruction and opened colleagues up to have more focused dialogue around student achievement and conversation around a clear academic focus.”

SLOs helped with clarity of purpose, helped teachers stay on track, and aligned teaching with objectives. The common theme among some participants was the perception that teachers can become more conscious of their instruction and its impact. One teacher, Celeste, highlighted that the process helped teachers have a clearer focus in order to achieve goals.

According to the Curriculum Coordinator, Danielle, the process was helpful as it helped to sharpen the focus as to what needed to be achieved. In some ways, teachers were more genuine in regard to the most important knowledge and skills that students needed to attain. It made the teachers more conscious of their instruction. The goals for achievement became more explicit and instructional planning became more direct in order to achieve goals. SLOs captured priority
content and teachers were genuine in regard to the most important things that they teach and it made a difference. Bob shared that it helped educators sharpen their focus on what had to happen in regard to student achievement.

**SLOs facilitated on-going monitoring of student progress.** The SLO process, as perceived by some participants, was seen as having a positive impact on teacher process because it facilitated the on-going monitoring of student progress. The process allowed teachers to constantly reassess practice as they monitored student progress throughout the entire year. Maya mentioned that “ongoing monitoring encouraged the use of similar SLO tasks by grade level.” Moreover, she mentioned this process had not been done in the past. Participants shared that they had more use of formative assessments than ever before, and used them to give timely feedback through on-demand assessments. This allowed for more discussion about student work and performance. Kenny also felt that from his point of view as a District Evaluator that “the on-going monitoring of student progress alleviated the former notion of reviewing student progress only at starting and ending points.” He went on to share that on-going monitoring contributed to adjustments in instruction and had a positive impact on teacher practice. The increased use of formative assessments for the purpose of on-going monitoring assisted in identifying whether students were performing and whether SLO targets would be reached and teachers adjusted as necessary based on the information that they collected.

**SLOs facilitated re-teaching.** One of the valuable results of on-going monitoring of student achievement was the benefit of quickly knowing when re-teaching was needed. Teachers did not want to allow for gaps in student knowledge. Celeste shared that the mid-year review was a good indicator of students’ depth of understanding in regard to content. According to Celeste, “If by mid-year students had not learned what they needed to, teachers did a re-teach of concepts
or teachers used the strategy of putting skills that needed to be reviewed in a daily warm-up exercise.” Kesha was in alignment with Celeste as she shared that” the process served as a way to assist in making the determination as to what should be re-taught immediately after a lesson, after an assessment or after a review of content covered at the mid-year point.” Kesha implemented a new practice of doing an item analysis to determine where re-teaching needed to happen and she allowed students to self-evaluate.

**SLOs facilitated consistency within and among schools.** One practice that was re-evaluated was the practice of ensuring consistency among grade level teams and departments. Ashley highlighted that as a District Evaluator she noticed “there were more discussions and more practices to achieve consistency between schools and to establish that all schools and all kids in the same grade should be working towards the same goal.” For example, Ashley and Kenny shared that the common mission would be to re-evaluate and ensure that all second grade students were working toward the same academic goals and using the same common assessments.

**Research Question 2. What Was the Most Challenging Aspect of the SLO Process, as Perceived by Teachers, Principals and District Evaluators?**

Through an analysis of participant responses the researcher has identified the following themes that are aligned to research question 2: (1) Lack of clear guidance about how to implement SLOs caused stress; and (2) targets and assessments were dictated by senior, district level administrators, not by teachers. Each theme is supported by highlights of participant points of view and quotes. The themes are a direct result of participant answers captured during the thirty minute interview process.
Lack of clear guidance about how to implement SLOs caused stress. The process as perceived by a few participants was seen as a stressful hindrance to their teaching practice. Ashley shared that teachers viewed the SLO process as something that was in addition to what they do and was not done in tandem with what they already do as educators. Participants were in agreement that the theoretical foundation of SLOs is reasonable. They agreed that teachers should be empowered to set targets and choose assessments for their students. However, it seemed as if that was not the case in regard to how the process was actually implemented. They described a need for improvement in implementation of the process as the lack of consistency and understanding may have kept the process from doing what it was intended to do.

Karen said the process was “challenging at first because it was new and because teachers did not know how to do it, especially regarding thinking about growth and how to best incorporate it.” She went on to share that the commissioner came to the district for a visit and spoke about SLOs and her vision was very different from the district’s understanding. This caused more complications than one might expect. One point made was that the process needed to be refined to provide clearer and more precise language because participants found the language to be vague and this was the cause of some stress. The lack of clarity made teachers more worried about teaching the specific skills that would only be found on a pre-selected assessment by district leadership and that actually stifled the teaching process and stifled teachers’ creativity. The majority of participants pinpointed that the process of identifying and setting targets was a major source of contention. Also, things kept changing, such as what teachers were told in regard to the way in which the targets should be set. Teachers and evaluators were constantly rewriting and always questioned what administrators were looking for. Participants shared that the directions provided by the state and the district about target
setting was loose and inconsistent. However, the researcher did identify that the state provided a
guidebook and samples on the RIDE website, and participants noted specifically that the
language around target setting was unclear.

Targets and assessments were dictated by senior, district level administrators, not
by teachers. The curriculum should establish the priority content unless there are any
extenuating circumstances, and when that was not done the process was a challenge. Part of this
challenge was that the pre- and post-test assessments were determined by the district and
ultimately the targets were set by the district as well. According to participants, because the
district chose the assessments and teachers did have a choice in determining the baseline for their
students, the process compromised the quality of assessments as there was some unfamiliarity
with the assessments that were chosen. The intention of the state was to empower teachers to
work together to choose the most important content and have them set targets and choose
assessments after reviewing the academic make up of their classroom and after collecting
baseline data (RIDE, 2012, p. 30). Thus, the district choosing assessments forced content to be
driven by assessments rather than the other way around. Since SLOs were based on an
assessment teachers were not used to, they were nervous about what it would mean for their
SLOs.

Participants also stated that assessments, in general, were being created to capture
isolated skills when a teacher’s responsibility encompasses greater responsibilities than the
teaching of isolated skills. Karen shared that SLOs were set for teachers by the district and
found that to be unfair as it devalued the participant because the district chose the level of growth
they felt was accurate. However, teachers claimed they were supposed to make those decisions
because they knew the students, whereas, district level administrators did not know the students.
Danielle shared that “getting teachers to set reasonable goals was a challenge.” The goals had to be rigorous but attainable, and this was very difficult for teachers and principals. Due to the fact that there were blanketed goals, the teacher found goals were too low for some and too high for others. There was an interim superintendent at the time who did not want to deal with the fight of forcing more rigorous goals based on students’ appropriate levels of preparedness. The disparity in the targets created a lack of trust in using the SLO as a measure that impacted a teacher’s evaluation. Participants made it clear that there was no historical data upon which the district could base projections after setting targets.

**Research Question 3. What Was the Most Worthwhile Aspect of the SLO Process, as Perceived by Teachers, Principals and District Evaluators?**

Through an analysis of responses the researcher has identified the following themes that are aligned to answers of research question 3: (1) Greater student growth; (2) greater focus on student learning; (3) improved professional development for teachers; and (4) high quality assessments were rarely used. These themes are a result of participant reflection through a series of interview questions. Each theme is supported by quotes from participants.

**Greater student growth.** One teacher pointed out that the process prompted the use of more formative assessments that, in turn, allowed for timely feedback in regard to student performance and promoted student growth. Erica shared her perspective as a principal and stated that “the uniform SLO process designed by RIDE did offer a context in which teachers could administer an assessment, establish a baseline, determine a focus for instruction, and measure progress.” Danielle enjoyed the fact that teachers could see growth with their students and were encouraged when they saw growth but found it disheartening when they did not. Normally, when discussing student growth, the conversation pertained solely to state testing results, a process that
helped teachers determine where they needed to help kids grow more and where they needed to grow in their practice. Karen shared that it was somewhat easier for teachers in the areas of math and reading to get support and have access to assessments. However, this was more difficult for teachers in non-tested subjects as there was a lack of instruments to use. Teachers were excited to see the amount of growth that had taken place and to identify where students performed well and where students struggled with content.

**Greater focus on student learning.** In general, all participants felt dedicated to the field of education and agreed that their most important role was to have a positive impact on student learning. Everyone wanted to maximize student learning and Erica mentioned that the ownership for moving students was on the teachers and there was no excuse when students did not increase in achievement. So, the process allowed teachers to have their practice make academic gains and provided a structure for leading teachers to realize the data were important. Over time, more teachers grew into the practice of using data to drive instruction which, in turn, impacted student learning. Danielle agreed with Erica and also shared that there were more student centered conversations. As a part of the process there were conversations that were driving the need to focus on bringing in supports and resources as a result.

All participants found the focus on student learning to be the most worthwhile part of the SLO process as it encouraged all educators to apply a greater sense of urgency to their focus on student learning. The belief among participants was that the process promoted more accountability for teachers and students alike. Teachers focused on the role of using data to drive instruction. The collection of data and administration of assessments were seen as necessary to help ground the SLO process. Determining the most appropriate amount of student learning was also a challenge. It was also challenging to maintain consistency among schools. However,
SLOs helped to bring about a higher level of accountability. There was a collective need to make academic gains and move towards creating common assessments. Thus, if students went from one school to another there was uniformity.

**Improved professional development for teachers.** There was a lot of focus on training administrators on the SLO process. In addition, the administrators participated in workshops but there was not much in the way of professional development designed for teachers by RIDE. Celeste shared that during a beginning of the year in-service, teachers were given only one day to write the SLO, and no professional development beyond that was given. There was no conversation from the perspective of the participants as to how SLOs would flow with the curriculum. One day of training was not enough. Moreover, there was insufficient conversation and professional development around how curriculum and assessments play a part in the SLO writing process. Erica shared that there was also no professional development around collecting data and administering assessments over time toward making the targets. That could have been helpful and may have served to alleviate some of the aforementioned stress that was felt by teachers. Even though teachers went through challenges, these challenges helped to determine what professional development would be needed in subsequent years make the SLO setting process smoother in its future implementation.

**Higher quality assessments were rarely used.** All participants shared that there was not much use of high quality assessment. The lack of assessment in literacy frustrated teachers and they felt there was a lack of administrative support in regard to what was considered an accurate and valid assessment. Moreover, there was no help in creating assessments. Teachers wanted more direction when it came to creating and choosing quality assessments. Some teachers worked together as a team and went with what they thought was best and did not receive
much scrutiny by other people before their use. For the most part, only the targets were looked at and not necessarily how the students were being assessed to meet those targets. Participants also shared that because the need for quality assessments became apparent through this process, teachers began creating data teams to determine whether students were meeting objectives. In addition, teachers began creating plans to respond when students were not meeting objectives. The use of formative assessments increased and helped teachers to use data from assessments to better identify where students were excelling and where more attention was needed. One participant saw this in a positive light, pointing out that the process highlighted the lack of quality assessments that could be a catalyst for needed change; at least, she explained, there was recognition that there were not enough common assessments across grade levels. The case study interview also highlighted the fact that in some schools there were no common assessments available at all, making the process more difficult for teachers outside the core subject areas.

**Summary of Findings**

Overall, all participants in the study regardless of their position agreed that the setting of learning objectives was critical in ensuring that teachers had a clear focus on their students. It also helped to ensure that the students knew what their academic end point was supposed to be or the content that they were to master. However, participants also agree that the content was inappropriately dictated by senior district level administrators. This happened because targets and assessments were identified by administrators and not by the teachers themselves. This, unfortunately, put teachers in a situation where they were identifying content for their SLO based upon an assessment that was chosen by the district. In essence, it seemed to them that the assessments drove the SLO more than the content.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction: Problem and Significance

The national conversation regarding teacher effectiveness is contentious. As states work to ensure that all students have effective teachers, they are creating new educator evaluation systems that include students’ academic growth as a measure of teacher performance, marking a significant shift in the ways teachers focus their practice in the classroom. In measuring effectiveness, states seek to hone in on teachers’ abilities to move student learning forward in an academic setting. As a part of this process, many states and districts are deploying SLOs as a means to capture student achievement, encouraging and necessitating more research on SLOs and their impact.

While gaps in the research are significant on the topic of SLOs, there is still an increase in the use of SLOs for evaluation purposes. This presents tremendous challenges for educators at the district and school levels as they work to adjust to new standards and practices. Also because the state of Rhode Island, as a part of their Educator Evaluation and Support System, has embedded the SLO process as the third component of their evaluation for teachers, this research is timely. This feeds into the current and relevant issue in education and the reason for this case study.

The researcher sought to gather information on the impact that the SLO process had on teachers who are using SLOs as a part of their evaluation. The hope is that the findings and recommendations from this case study will provide key insights and serve as an informative document for the decision makers who are embarking on this work and tying student achievement to teacher evaluations. The following discussion of the findings will begin to bring to light the impact of SLOs on practice, including the challenges and the successes from a district
that has embarked on SLOs as mandated by new evaluation polices set forth by the Rhode Island Department of Education and can highlight outcomes after a full implementation. The discussion of the findings will also revisit the theoretical framework and literature review in light of their support to this study and their relationship to the researcher’s recommendations based on the research findings.

**Discussion of Findings**

The research findings reported in this section are the direct outcome of the case study that served to investigate the SLO process in one Rhode Island School district. These findings are the result of interviews that took place to determine answers to the following research questions:

1. How does the setting and ongoing monitoring of SLOs impact teachers’ practice, as perceived by teachers and district evaluators?
2. What was the most challenging aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers and district evaluators?
3. What was the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process, as perceived by teachers and district evaluators?

**Observed impact of SLOs on teacher practice.** Overall, the participants themselves did not make a direct correlation between their practice and the SLO process. Participants commented that practice was not adjusted because of the SLO, but they did say process motivated them to ensure that material was covered. The impact on their practice seemed to be viewed as an indirect one as what they described does allude to an adjustment in professional practice. Some participants did share that if they had to identify one way that their practice was impacted it would be that they reassessed student achievement goals and reflected on their practice more than they had before it had been structured in a required process. Reassessing and reflecting
have led to more focus on providing students with timely and quality feedback through the use of formative assessments. The use of formative assessments and feedback allowed for teachers to identify where re-teaching was necessary.

The researcher found it interesting that the participants spoke of reassessing and reflecting more intentionally as if that change did not constitute an adjustment in practice. There seemed to be a disassociation between the on-going monitoring and assessment and its direct link to adjustment of teacher practice based on the data they received from monitoring and assessing students’ academic growth. This may simply be an element of implementation at the beginning of the process, but it also suggests a need for increased dialogue at all levels about all that teacher practice includes.

**The SLO process was challenging.** Considering the contentious public discourse on the topic of SLOs, the most profound revelation from completing this research is that all participants stated that they believe in and like the theory behind SLOs. They all agreed that the SLO process can capture and monitor growth and progress. Wittman-Price and Fasolka (2010), who view learning objectives as the foundation for learning, could be intrigued by this revelation from the educators in the study, as their thinking is all in alignment. A central challenge identified was that the participants felt that the process was not being implemented in the nature in which it had been designed by the state, with urgent problems to address around assessments.

The participants unequivocally agreed that the implementation of the SLOs overall was a challenge. The Rhode Island Educator Evaluation and Support System (2012) advises that teachers should create targets after reviewing their students’ academic historical data so that baseline data is used to set appropriate targets. Participants found it troubling that there was a departure from this practice at the district level. In many instances, the amount of growth or
progress was not determined by students’ starting points as defined by teachers’ use of historical data. Instead the targets were set by the district for the teacher, which goes against the core intentions of the SLO process. The teacher participants in the study believe that this led to a problem in which growth targets were perceived as being too low or too high. The district’s decision to take the target setting process away from teachers could attribute to the feeling that the process was not a fair component of the evaluation system as it was implemented in the year studied.

A critical component of the SLO process is the use of assessments to measure students’ academic growth. The lack of quality assessments to choose from made the process challenging for participants. When asked in the interviews to identify a challenge in the SLO process, all participants—administrators and teachers—chose assessments. There seems to be a lack in access to common assessments across subject areas and a feeling among educators that only commercial standardized assessments are best. The choosing and using of quality assessments has been identified as significant challenges.

Teachers use assessments to determine a baseline in order to choose appropriate targets for their students. They also use formative assessments to monitor on-going progress in order to adjust their own practice or to provide additional supports to students. Participants shared that they at times used assessments that they were not comfortable with or did not perceive as being reliable. In some cases, teachers did work together to create their own assessments as RIDE guidelines suggested. Participants who worked with grade level or subject area colleagues appreciated the collaboration in designing assessments. The participants who collaborated in the creation of assessments also shared that the assessments were not vetted by anyone but themselves and were approved without review.
The SLO process was worthwhile. Engaging in dialogue, collaborating with colleagues and increasing the focus on student learning have shown through this research to be a common theme among administrators and teachers in the study. They wanted to see an increased level of communication from the district in consistent and clear language about identifying what progress is and looks like in an academic setting across grade level teams and subject areas. The team approach according to Stiggins and DeFour (2009) provides a powerful format through which teachers can learn how to create or choose high-quality assessments and which can assist the team in creating a common understanding of standards and a common vision. Participants shared that they now look at data differently as a way to drive their instruction and assess how students are progressing and where they need additional supports. The process has promoted collaboration in the design of and confirmed the need for common tasks. A positive impact of SLO implementation was that it began a conversation that continues in the district around a need for consistency between schools, grade levels and subject teams especially regarding target setting and assessments.

Research Findings in Light of Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study and the intersection of this research with the shift in teacher assessment strategies positions Mezirow’s Transformational Learning Theory to support the idea of student learning objectives for evaluation. SLOs may be considered the “new view” Mezirow values in their potential to transform ways that student learning and teacher performance are assessed.

Transforming the learning that takes place in an academic setting is intentional and pushes a student towards academic growth by progress or mastery. Mezirow (2000) provides a structure and process through which we can better understand adult growth and development.
To translate that approach to Pre-K-12 students, educators can create learning objectives that best meet the needs of their students by using historical data to determine how they should grow and develop academically. This approach also supports the views of participants who focused on the content that needs to be covered to provide teachers with a clearer objective. With this focus, the SLO process can help students to move from a passive way of being educated to a more active way for students to incorporate, share and demonstrate knowledge.

Mezirow (2000) drives home the notion that adult learning is “deep learning” as students are made a part of the information sharing that happens in an academic setting. The same could be said for the SLO process which encourages the sharing and demonstration of knowledge through a variety of ways. RIDE (2012) highlights this point by suggesting that teachers should monitor progress through formative and summative assessments and that these assessments shouldn’t always be traditional paper and pencil assessments. Varying the demonstration and application of knowledge is also supported by Freire (1970). This thought allows students to do more than just receive facts and be measured by the extent of their memory. As students enter at varying levels of preparedness the stage should be set for them to display and share their knowledge in ways that could be different than their peers. The SLO process allows for and supports differentiation.

**Intersection of Research Results and Literature Review**

As there is little research on the subject of SLOs, the hope is that this study begins to grow the conversation and research around student learning objectives as a means to evaluate teachers. The researcher found that one hole in this process that would require more review would be the use and selection of assessments. Lachlan-Hache, et. al, (2012) share that “SLOs can be created to draw on different data sources such as educator-created assessments,
performance assessments or rubric based assessments (p.1).” The concept shared by Lachlan-Hache, et. al is an important one as the research showed that teachers were uneasy about the selection of assessments and determination of the best way to measure student achievement. In some ways, if the participants were uneasy about the assessment, they were then also uneasy about the SLO process as a whole. Measuring student achievement as a part of the SLO process can be varied to allow students to demonstrate and apply their level of knowledge in a way that is best for them. RIDE (2012) supports that idea by stating that “various assessments may be used as evidence of target attainment, ranging from teacher-created performance tasks to commercial standardized assessments (p. 35).” RIDE (2012) does however caution educators in regard to the notion that standardization means high quality. Some, ostensibly more than exists now, experience is needed in the overall knowledge of assessments and their purpose when solidifying the SLO process. SLOs “can expand teacher capacity to evaluate the quality and reliability of assessments (Slotnik, et. al., 2013, p. 34).” All assessments will not be considered high quality, regardless of the source. Assessments should be varied as the level of preparedness with which a student approaches a level of content will be varied, and this variance can assist in accurately measuring student achievement. Slotnik, et. al. promotes the fact [that] “SLOs improve a teacher’s use of measures, including the increasing use of multiple forms of measurement (2013, p. 34).”

As shared by Slotnik, et. al., the SLO process is an approach to improve and measure student learning (2013). SLOs also serve as a way to assist in shifting teacher practice in a way that promotes better student outcomes. Participants in the process agreed with the meaning and purpose of the SLOs as teachers are expected to enable student achievement to increase. However, the uniformed learning objective setting and scoring process as a measure of teacher
effectiveness is new to educators. Slotnik, et. al. refers to this new change as an instructional reform (2013, p. 32). Slotnik, et. al also mentions that “the SLO process is not a pre-packaged reform (p. 31)”.

It is an effort to monitor student progress throughout the whole year and not just at targeted points in the year. This on-going monitoring helps teachers to ensure students are making progress and that teachers can adjust their practice as needed when students are not.

RIDE administrators wrote in a guidebook on the new evaluation system that “throughout the year, the teacher will collect information about students’ learning according to the plan and bring those data to conferences in order to discuss students’ progress” (2012, p. 42). This concept promotes a dialogue between teachers and their evaluators about student progress. RIDE also states that “teachers should closely monitor students’ learning throughout the instructional interval and make necessary instructional adjustments when students are not progressing as expected” (2012, p. 42).

Limitations to the Study

There were several limitations to the study. The researcher wanted a wide variety of participants to span grade levels and subjects as this variance would lend itself to a more robust study. However, she was unsuccessful in varying the participants in regard to grade level and subject. While there were representatives from core subjects, they were all at the elementary level and middle school levels, and building level administrators were all from the elementary level. More insight from secondary educators at the high school level would have provided a more comprehensive view of the SLO process including more insight and possibly additional information about challenges and benefits unique to the secondary level. Also, there was only one teacher participant from a non-core subject. The researcher also believes that the study could have benefited from special education teachers, teachers in the specialty areas (ie. Art,
Music, and PE) as well as ESL teachers. The absence of these participants provides a void in the study. The researcher believes that the study could have been enriched by participants from the secondary grade levels and the non-core subjects to weigh in on the impact, challenges and successes of the SLO process.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends four actions that RIDE could take as leaders continue to respond to challenges and improve the SLO process. All four would also be appropriate for other districts or states to consider when implementing SLOs as part of the student assessment and/or teacher evaluation process: 1) clarify the purpose of an SLO, 2) identify quality assessments, 3) improve assessment literacy and 4) implement professional development opportunities for teachers that align with the submission, on-going monitoring, revision and scoring of SLOs. The first and most important recommendation is to clarify that the SLO in and of itself is not an assessment. The SLO process is just that; it is a process and assessments are used as a part of the process of determining a baseline and setting rigorous yet attainable targets as measured by an assessment. Clearly and consistently communicating the actual purpose of the SLO would lead to a better understanding among district employees, as participants in this study do not currently view the SLO process as something done in tandem with their current practice. Lachlan-Hache, et. al (2012) suggest that districts may want to outwardly recognize that the use of SLOs in an evaluative form is a shift in educator practice. The researcher has also determined from participant interviews that the process right now seems to be viewed as something new to add and is set apart from what they currently do as an extra task. Especially considering participants’ feelings that the SLO process did overlap with and document core work they were already doing, the SLO process should not
and does not have to be seen as a bureaucratic “add-on.” Rather, the shift in practice should be discussed in terms of how the SLO process comes together with current work while focusing teachers on student learning and using data to drive instruction in ways they may not have been doing before.

The researcher’s second recommendation is to identify quality assessments. RIDE (2012) states that “High-quality assessments are essential to the accurate measurement of students’ learning” (p. 35). Stiggins (2005) also reminds us that we assess to make instructional decisions. The first glaring revelation from this study is the need for quality assessments and clear guidance regarding how to use and choose assessments. There is also a need to encourage more talks about data and how it fits into the SLO and teacher practice. Conversations around the data that come about as a result of using an assessment can assist teachers in knowing what skills need to be developed and where students are excelling. These conversations around assessment may also identify where a teacher should continue a specific instructional practice or where the instructional practices need to be adjusted.

The third recommendation this case study suggests is to improve assessment literacy. Teachers need assistance in choosing the assessments that are best for their students. It could not only build a level of comfort and trust among teachers, but also build teachers’ ability to ensure that they are choosing the best type of assessments to measure student learning. Building this type of literacy could help determine when it is best to use a commercial assessment, but also spread understanding that commercial assessments do not always mean better assessments. Cope (1996) supports the idea that commercial assessments are not always best as students should be able to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of ways and not only in a summative fashion. Building assessment literacy can give teachers a clear understanding of creative and
non-traditional ways to measure student learning. Increasing teachers’ knowledge about assessments could also assist administrators as they work to support their teachers in the SLO process. When it comes to assessment literacy, Anderson and Anderson (2011) remind us that it is not just teachers who should be assessment literate. Leaders also have to increase their awareness and skill. Anderson and Anderson support what this study showed about the importance of assessment knowledge for principals as well. Building this skill could help principals make the best decisions using the appropriate data and increase teachers’ ability to have data discussions with their colleagues.

The fourth and final recommendation is to provide more professional development designed specifically for teachers. One area of concern that teachers identified was that most of the professional development around SLOs was designed for their administrators and not for them. Teachers would benefit from having the opportunity to take part in the professional development themselves and not rely on turnkey information that was not designed specifically to meet their own classrooms and professional needs. Lachlan-Hache, et al (2012) recommend on-going training to ensure rigor and consistency throughout the school and district. Professional development should be made available for teachers throughout the year and could serve to be a way to ensure consistent communication in regard to the purpose of an SLO. It could also provide a forum for teachers to discuss how to measure progress and monitor student achievement through the SLO process.

It could be helpful if the district would now identify any potential professional development to be offered in the next school year. Pre-planning with the focus around teachers and their ability to write an SLO, choose assessments, monitor progress, and adjust instruction could enhance the potential of the SLO process and the effectiveness of its implementation.
Increasing professional development could also assist in integrating opportunities to enhance professional growth and maximize student achievement.

**Implications for Further Study**

There is a need to extend the research to pursue additional questions that the researcher has identified as a result of this current study. One underlying theme that came out of the research was the strong emotions of individuals in Mathematics or Language Arts who felt as if they were more scrutinized because their subject matter was a tested subject. The implication was that teachers in tested areas had it harder and teachers in non-tested areas received less help or accolades because they were in non-tested subjects. More research is needed to explore teachers’ perceptions of fairness of the SLO process as it could impact their practice and does play a part in their evaluations which ultimately affect their certifications. The goal is to conduct more research in order to assist in mitigating the inevitable fears inherent to the desire to perform well and eliminating unnecessary fears based on failures in communication from the district that could negatively impact practice. The intent is to ensure accountability and objectivity while keeping in mind that there are some outliers that are beyond the scope of the teacher and the school.

Researchers who want to build on this work may consider:

- replicating this study with a focus on charter schools;
- replicating this study with a focus on non-core subject areas;
- replicating this study with a focus solely on upper grades and subjects; and/or
- replicating this study in conjunction with districts that are building assessment literacy, including all grades and subject areas.
Conclusion

The researcher views student learning as an academic process that is continuous in nature with assessments and learning objectives working hand in hand to identify a baseline, set objectives, measure the progress towards the objectives that were set and to measure the attainment of targets. It is important to use assessments as key data points to analyze to what extent students are progressing and to determine where teachers need to adjust their instructional practice. These data points and analysis of student performance through assessments can assist in determining what other supports students may need to be successful in an academic setting and determine how teachers can be supported in improving their practice as well.

The participants in the study all came to the conclusion that SLOs in their purest sense are a way to ensure and capture that students are learning. It was encouraging to hear participants share that the SLO process increased levels of collaboration and the engagement that colleagues had with one another. Their admissions of the positive aspects lend credence to the idea that the SLO process is a promising tool for measuring student progress and teacher effectiveness. Their comments and views on implementation of SLOs suggest that the inclusion of the SLO process as an evaluative measure of teacher effectiveness should be delayed until the issue of assessments and the challenges of a consistent implementation have been resolved.

The SLO process requires that teachers identify targeted levels of academic mastery/progress as measured by carefully chosen assessments as pieces of evidence. The SLO process and the focus on assessments promotes a review of student data to look for patterns, trends, strengths and weaknesses for both whole groups and sub-groups of students to determine their academic needs. As a way to measure student growth, SLOs demonstrate a teacher’s impact on student learning within a given interval of instruction. Further, they set the stage for
teachers to use their own knowledge of appropriate student progress to make meaningful decisions about how their students’ learning is measured. In order to ensure that assessments are used throughout this process as they are intended, it is imperative that districts and schools build teachers’ levels of assessment literacy so they may choose, use and create quality assessments. Cranton (1994) views the educator as the provocateur, one who challenges, stimulates, and provokes critical thinking (p.128). Applying this view to the setting of learning objectives within a K-12 setting provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect and create a new, more reliable, and meaningful way of impacting student achievement. As there is a shift in evaluation processes and waves of reform are taking place, SLOs can serve as a way to allow teachers to feel and have ownership over the way their students are assessed and provide more than one singular standardized assessment snapshot as evidence of student achievement and the educator’s impact. The research shows that districts and schools have to allow teachers to be empowered to use multiple measures and select targets after they have identified the essential learning that is to take place. Derailing from the intended process by setting “cookie cutter” goals undermines the authority of and respect for the teacher, who should be able to use the historic academic data and baseline they have determined in their professional role.

In short, SLOs are significant to the educational community as they illuminate the focus on student performance by identifying what students are expected to learn within a specific interval of time and how their academic achievement will be measured. However, there is still more research that needs to be done on SLOs including both their impact on teacher evaluations and fidelity of implementation. Continued research on the effect that SLOs play in teacher evaluation in conjunction with clarity of purpose communicated during implementation may help to remove some of the doubts that educators have in the process in part by increasing their
familiarity and comfort levels in weaving the SLO process into teaching practice successfully. Further research may also contribute to the field by validating the notion that when implemented with consistency SLOs can have an enormous impact of student achievement and teacher practice.
Appendix
Research Interview Questions-Teacher

1. How did the setting and on-going monitoring of SLOs impact your practice as a teacher?

2. What was the most challenging aspect of the SLO process and why?

3. What was the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process and why?

4. What was the collaboration process like when setting your SLOs with your colleagues?

5. How did you determine the appropriate amount of content to cover within your interval of instruction?

6. How did you determine a baseline to set appropriate targets for your students?

7. Did your evaluator provide you with meaningful feedback on your SLOs?

8. How many SLOs did you set during the 2012-2013 school year?

9. What training did you receive before having to set SLOs?

10. How did the SLO process change how you chose assessments to measure student learning?
Research Interview Questions-District Evaluator, Curriculum Coordinator & Principal

1. From your perspective, how did the setting and on-going monitoring of SLOs impact teacher practice?

2. As an evaluator, what was the most challenging aspect of the SLO process and why?

3. As an evaluator, what was the most worthwhile aspect of the SLO process and why?

4. Did the district promote teachers working collaboratively to set SLOs? If so, how did teachers have opportunities to meet with one another?

5. How did you assist teachers in determining the appropriate amount of content to cover within your interval of instruction?

6. How did you assist teachers in determining a baseline to set appropriate targets for your students?

7. What do you think is the most meaningful piece of feedback you gave to a teacher in regard to their SLOs?

8. How many SLOs did you set during the 2012-2013 school year?

9. What training did you provide for teachers before having them set SLOs?

10. How did the SLO process change how you chose assessments to measure student learning?
Student Learning Objective – Teacher Form

Name: Sample Submitted by Bob  Content Area: Robotics  Grade Level(s): 6-8

Student Learning Objective: This SLO measures: progress _____ mastery _____

Students will demonstrate mastery of theoretical and practical robotics-based engineering principles and skills. The sixth grade Robotics students will demonstrate mastery of computer programming skills and how pneumatic devices can be applied to generate power for air compressors, a people lifter and the jaws of life. The eight grade Robotics students will demonstrate mastery of building robotic devices and programming robots to complete obstacle course challenges.

Rationale: Why have you chosen this objective? How do you know this is a worthy area of focus?

The study of Robotics is anchored by having students study and create models based on applied pre-engineering skills in accordance with the Rhode Island Department of Education established Engineering and Technology standards for middle school students. The primary goal is acclimating students to the fundamental skills that students need in order for them to make an informed choice about pursuing a career in the field of engineering. The Robotics classes target 6th and 8th grade students to educate the youngsters with content that can be considered as the first rung on the ladder for embarking on an engineering career pathway.

Aligned Standards: To which CCSS, RI GSEs/GLEs, or other RI / national standards, does this objective align?

ET1 – Listing and describing the importance of technology in daily life
ET2 – Researching and analyzing the effects on humankind and the environment that a particular technology has had over a period of time (and future implications)
ET3 – The designed world community selects and uses appropriate technology

Students: Which students will this objective address? How many? From which grades/classes?

This objective is targeted for two sections of 6th Grade and two sections of 8th Grade Robotics that include approximately 300 students over the span of the academic school year.

Interval of Instruction: Semesters, trimesters, or one school year?

The 8th Grade Robotics classes are scheduled for 1 semester and the 6th Grade Robotics classes are scheduled for one quarter.

Evidence & Target(s): Where do you expect this population of students to be at the end of the time interval? How are you going to measure student learning? At least one source of evidence is required,
but multiple sources of evidence may be used. If a common assessment exists, it must be used as the primary source of evidence.

**Evidence:** My theory-based learning evidence source is drawn from the compilation of quizzes, tests and application of concepts to create projects. The practical learning is assessed through rubric scored projects and student’s presentation of their projects. **Target:** Eighty percent of the Robotics students will achieve a final grade of 80 or better.

**Rationale for Target:** Why was this target chosen? How do you know it is an appropriate target? What pre-test or baseline information/data, if any, are available for this objective for the student population?

The target was chosen on the basis of the exploratory dynamic of the classes and the opportunities for differentiated approaches to applied learning through project-based activities.
**Administration & Scoring:** How will evidence be collected? How will evidence be scored?

Students will be assessed on a weekly basis according to project-based rubrics, assignments, quiz grades, class participation and presentation of completed projects.

**Approval of Objective:** Evaluator should rate the Student Learning Objective in the following categories. Objectives rated as Unacceptable in any category should be revised and resubmitted.

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<td>Priority of Content</td>
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**Date(s) of Revision (if applicable):**

*Once the above information has been discussed and agreed upon by the administrator and evaluator, please sign below.*

Administrator

__________________________________________________________________________________

Evaluator

___________________________________________________________________________________

Date ____________________________

**Results:** Teacher should explain evidence of student learning. How many targets were met? To what degree were targets met?

Scoring: Evaluator should check the box that best indicates the teacher’s attainment of this student learning objective.

*Individual ratings should serve as the basis for an overall rating using the holistic rubric.*

Did the teacher meet this student learning objective? Did Not Meet Met Exceeded
Sample Teacher Form #1, Submitted by Bob

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVE – Teacher Form

Name: Sample Submitted by Bob  
Content Area: Robotics  
Grade Level(s): 6-8

Student Learning Objective:  This SLO measures: progress x mastery

In response to the [OSSD] student learning objective goals I have documented a snapshot that serves as an example. Students will learn about a variety of potential career choices based on categories of engineering by analyzing informational text covering a range of engineering career pathways. Students will read and summarize text, complete quizzes and write an essay about an engineering career pathway.

Rationale: Why have you chosen this objective? How do you know this is a worthy area of focus?

The study of Robotics includes the exploration of how engineering impacts the world and growth of humankind and how engineers choose and select appropriate technology. Student enrolled in robotics classes learn by building and programming scale model robots and related machines but they also need to understand how these skills can be applied in an engineering career. Theory lessons support the students understanding of the increasingly emerging world of engineering technologies and this helps youngsters develop career choices.

Aligned Standards: To which CCSS, RI GSEs/GLEs, or other RI / national standards, does this objective align?

ET1.1 1b. – Listing and describing the importance of technology in daily life
ET1.2 2b. – Researching and analyzing the effects on humankind and the environment that a particular technology has had over a period of time (and future implications)

Students: Which students will this objective address? How many? From which grades/classes?

This objective is targeted for two sections of Robotics that include approximately 40 students.
**Interval of Instruction:** *Semesters, trimesters, or one school year?*

The Robotics classes are scheduled for 1 semester.

**Evidence & Target(s):** *Where do you expect this population of students to be at the end of the time interval? How are you going to measure student learning? At least one source of evidence is required, but multiple sources of evidence may be used. If a common assessment exists, it must be used as the primary source of evidence.*

Students are required to read two lengthy articles on engineering career paths and answer summary questions based on their analysis of the articles. The articles serve as a primer for understanding how 10 different types of professional engineers apply their skills in the workplace. Students are required to review the various categories of engineering and complete a quiz shortly after analyzing both articles. At the end of the semester, each student will be required to choose as least one category of engineering that they are interested in to write a detailed essay as a component of the end of term exam.

**Rationale for Target:** *Why was this target chosen? How do you know it is an appropriate target? What pre-test or baseline information/data, if any, are available for this objective for the student population?*

The target was chosen to complement students applied learning of robotics and pre-engineering skills with a background of theoretical knowledge. The theory provides a foundation for students who are inclined to pursue career and technical school subjects to make informed career choices. Every student benefits from developing a better understanding of how engineers contribute to the society to shape their understanding of the technology-based global economy.
**Administration & Scoring:** How will evidence be collected? How will evidence be scored?

Remainder of form redacted in light of study confidentiality

**Approval of Objective:** Evaluator should rate the Student Learning Objective in the following categories. Objectives rated as Unacceptable in any category should be revised and resubmitted.

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Date(s) of Revision (if applicable):

Once the above information has been discussed and agreed upon by the administrator and evaluator, please sign below:

Administrator

Evaluator

Date

**Results:** Teacher should explain evidence of student learning. How many targets were met? To what degree were targets met?

**Scoring:** Evaluator should check the box that best indicates the teacher’s attainment of this student learning objective. Individual ratings should serve as the basis for an overall rating using the holistic rubric.

Did the teacher meet this student learning objective? Did Not Meet Met Exceeded
Sample Teacher Form #2, Submitted by Erica (Online Submission)

**ATTENTION EDUCATORS:** When you have finished completing this form, click the **SUBMIT** button to send this SLO to your evaluator for approval. If you wish to save this SLO as a draft, use the **SAVE** button. If you wish to save your updates and solicit feedback from your evaluator, use the **SAVE & NOTIFY** button. (Note: SAVE & NOTIFY does not “Submit” the form - it will still be a draft.)

For more information, visit the RI Model Guidebooks & Forms guidance found [here (click to launch)].

*Title of SLO:*
Reading

**Grade Level:**
- 5

**Content Area:**
ELA/English

* Specify other Content Area:

**Number of Students:**
25

**Interval of Instruction:**
- Year-long

* Specify other Interval:

---

**Priority of Content**

**Essential Question:** What is the most important knowledge/skill(s) I want my students to attain by the end of the interval of instruction?

**Objective Statement:**
Students will improve their reading accuracy and fluency of literary and informational text, their comprehension of literary and informational text, and their ability to convey information about what they've read.

---

**Rationale:**
For the past year, our district has had a goal of ensuring that all students are reading on grade level by the time they complete elementary school. Reaching this objective will position them for future success both in English Language Arts and other content areas primarily accessed through written text.

---

**Aligned Standards:**
RF.5.3: Know and apply grade-level phonic and word analysis skills in decoding words.
RF.5.4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
RL.5.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
RI.5.10: By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, at the high end of the grades 4-5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
**Essential Question:** Where are my students now (at the beginning of instruction) with respect to the objective?

**Baseline Data/Information:**
Students' beginning-of-year DIBELS Composite scores:
- Core (Tier 1): 9 students scored in the core range
- Strategic (Tier 2): 12 students scored in the strategic range
- Intensive (Tier 3): 4 students scored in the intensive range

---

**Rigor of Target**

**Essential Question:** Based on what I know about my students, where do I expect them to be by the end of the interval of instruction and how will they demonstrate their knowledge/skill(s)?

**Target(s):**
Accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of text:
- Core (Tier 1): 100% of students in Core will continue to score in the Core range
- Strategic (Tier 2): 40% of students scoring in the strategic range will score in the Core range; all others will continue to score in the strategic range
- Intensive (Tier 3): 40% of students scoring in the intensive range will score in the Strategic range; all others will make Ambitious Growth as defined by national growth rates

**Rationale for Target(s):**
These targets are based on local and national norms for typical progress in DIBELS. They are tiered to reflect students' varying baseline scores. They align with the lowest average progress that historical district data has shown.
Quality of Evidence

Evidence Source(s):
Students' improvement of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension of literary and informational text will be measured by DIBELS Next measures.

Approval of Objective (Completed by the Evaluator)

Priority of Content:
Acceptable

Rigor of Target:
Acceptable

Quality of Evidence:
Acceptable

Notes:
Concerned with the number of students not in core.
Plan with grade level colleagues every Tuesday.
Resource and Reading support in place.
PM 15 of the 16 students.
Beginning to incorporate PARCC released tasks into instruction.

EVALUATOR INSTRUCTIONS

UNLOCKING THE FORM: To complete the Approval of Objective section, click EDIT FORM below to unlock the form. When asked to confirm, click YES. The Approval of Objective section is the only portion of the form you can edit. Note: if at any time during the school year this SLO needs to be modified, use the EDIT FORM button to unlock the form.

ACCEPTABLE: If this SLO is complete and you have indicated "Acceptable" in all three categories above, click the SUBMIT button below. The author will not receive an email, so you may wish to add a COMMENT (instructions below). Note: once the form is submitted, the author cannot make changes. If changes are needed, see "Unlocking the Form" above.

NEEDS REVISION: If this SLO is not acceptable and revisions are necessary, mark the appropriate category above as "Needs Revision" and click the SAVE & NOTIFY button below to alert the author of the need for revision.

COMMENTS: At any time, you (and/or the author) may use the COMMENT button below to attach a comment to this form. Comments trigger an email notification and can be made at any time until the form is finalized.
Title of SLO: Mathematics
Grade Level: 5
Content Area: Mathematics
Number of Students: 25
Interval of Instruction: Year-long

**Priority of Content**

**Essential Question:** What is the most important knowledge/skill(s) I want my students to attain by the end of the interval of instruction?

**Objective Statement:**
Students will improve their accuracy and fluency of important math concepts aligned to CCSS and the NCTM focal points for grade 5.

**Rationale:**
Students in grades K-4 worked on number sense, place value, addition/subtraction, multiplication/division concepts, skills and problem solving. Beginning in grade 5, students will learn concepts, skills, and problem solving for decimals and fractions.

**Aligned Standards:**
5.NF.1: Add and subtract fractions with unlike denominators (including mixed numbers) by replacing given fractions with equivalent fractions in such a way as to produce an equivalent sum or difference of fractions with like denominators.
5.NF.2: Solve word problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions referring to the same whole, including cases of unlike denominators, e.g., by using visual fraction models or equations to represent the problem. Use benchmark fractions and number sense of fractions to estimate mentally and assess the reasonableness of answers.
5.NBT.3: Read, write, and compare decimals to thousandths.
5.NBT.7: Add, subtract, multiply, and divide decimals to hundredths, using concrete models or drawings and strategies based on place value, properties of operations, and/or the relationship between addition and subtraction; relate the strategy to a written method and explain the reasoning used.
**Essential Question:** Where are my students now (at the beginning of instruction) with respect to the objective?

**Baseline Data/Information:**
Students' beginning-of-year EasyCBM Scores:
- Core (Tier 1): 14 students scored in the core range
- Strategic (Tier 2): 6 students scored in the strategic range
- Intensive (Tier 3): 5 students scored in the intensive range

---

**Rigor of Target**

**Essential Question:** Based on what I know about my students, where do I expect them to be by the end of the interval of instruction and how will they demonstrate their knowledge/skill(s)?

**Target(s):**
- Accuracy and fluency of important math concepts:
  - Core (Tier 1): 100% of students in Core will continue to score in the Core range
  - Strategic (Tier 2): 25% of students scoring in the strategic range will score in the Core range; all others will continue to score in the strategic range
  - Intensive (Tier 3): 25% of students scoring in the intensive range will score in the Strategic range; all others will make Ambitious Growth as defined by national growth rates

---

**Rationale for Target(s):**
These targets are based on national norms for typical progress in DIBELS. They are actually set at half the national expected growth since this is year 1 of implementation of a new assessment and a new curriculum. They also reflect the same goals set when DIBELS Next was first introduced. They are tiered to reflect students' varying baseline scores.

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**Quality of Evidence**

**Evidence Source(s):**
Students' improvement in accuracy and fluency as measured by EasyCBM measures.
### Approval of Objective (Completed by the Evaluator)

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<td>Notes:</td>
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**Notes:**
- Working on how to meet with groups across grade level with the new math curriculum.
- Planning together with colleagues every Tuesday.
- Will incorporate PARCC released tasks into instruction.
- PM once per month for yellow and twice per month for red. One student may be PM more often in preparation for RTI re-referral.

### EVALUATOR INSTRUCTIONS

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**COMMENTS:** At any time, you (and/or the author) may use the **COMMENT** button below to attach a comment to this form. Comments trigger an email notification and can be made at any time until the form is finalized.
September 24, 2013

Dear IRB Committee,

Please allow this brief notation to serve as my written consent for allowing Tamika A. Pollins to conduct research in our district, as a part of her Student Learning Objectives doctoral thesis. I understand that she will conduct interviews off site, the interview schedule will be designed at the convenience of the participants and she will review samples of Student Learning Objectives that were written by teachers who are willing to submit a sample with identifying information redacted. It is also my understanding that the district and participants will remain anonymous.

As Superintendent of the school district, I give permission for these research activities to take place.

Sincerely,
References


Community Training and Assistance Center. (2013). It’s more than money: Teacher Incentive Fund—Leadership for Educators’ Advanced Performance Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. Boston, MA: Community Training and Assistance Center


