The development of district SLOs has become one of the most complicated aspects of the implementation process. These objectives should build upon each other, meaning students should not be able to "symptomatically" describe the most important learning in which they have been working. This can be seen in Figure 1. The specific objective at various points throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Instructional objectives, or benchmarks, organize the SLO into manageable units across the year. When developing objectives, the focus should be on what teachers want their students to know and be able to do. The outline of each student learning objective has a central focus, one overarching element from which all benchmarks are stemmed. For example, the SLO may focus directly from the performing arts lists, and should clearly relate to the instructional objectives. In addition to the other musical concepts being taught throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Within Georgia’s TKES, there are three evaluation components: (a) Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), (b) Surveys of Instructional Practice, and (c) Student Growth. The purpose of this article is to look at student growth and what it means for music educators. Student growth refers to the amount of progress individual students make between two points in time. First, there are two divisions of the student growth component. Teachers of Tested Subjects (i.e., Math, Language Arts) measure student growth through Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) (GDOE, 2012b). SGP scores are gathered from various standardized tests such as End of Course Tests (EOCTs), AP tests, SATs, etc. Teachers of Non-Tested Subjects (i.e., performing arts, physical education) use Department of Education approved Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) applying district-identified achievement growth benchmarks (GDOE, 2012b). SLOs have been developed because there are no standardized tests from which to gather this student data.

Written by Dorothy Musselwhite

The SLO Framework

The SLO should be thought of as a framework to guide a specific focus of your teaching. The SLO is comprised of seven components: target population, interval, national standards, state standards, instructional objectives, growth targets/scoring, and rationale. Wesolowski (2014) provides a sample SLO outline in his Documenting Student Learning in Music Performance: A Framework. An example of this can be seen in Figure 1. The target population refers to the specific course being assessed (e.g., Grade 9-12 Advanced Band). The interval dictates the testing and growth window, which could range from a semester to a year. National and State standards should be written directly from the performing arts lists, and should clearly relate to the instructional objectives. In addition, these leaders and administrators have asked teachers to develop measurement tools given very little training. One tool must be used across the district to measure a variety of student growth on a spectrum of ability. This tool, or measure, must be comprised of at least two examination points, a pre-test and a post-test, but may include benchmarks between these endpoints. In addition, the SLO must be rigorous to ensure growth will happen (USDOE, 2012a).

Within Georgia’s TKES, there are three evaluation components: (a) Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), (b) Surveys of Instructional Practice, and (c) Student Growth. The purpose of this article is to look at student growth and what it means for music educators. Student growth refers to the amount of progress individual students make between two points in time. First, there are two divisions of the student growth component. Teachers of Tested Subjects (i.e., Math, Language Arts) measure student growth through Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) (GDOE, 2012b). SGP scores are gathered from various standardized tests such as End of Course Tests (EOCTs), AP tests, SATs, etc. Teachers of Non-Tested Subjects (i.e., performing arts, physical education) use Department of Education approved Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) applying district-identified achievement growth benchmarks (GDOE, 2012b). SLOs have been developed because there are no standardized tests from which to gather this student data.

The development of district SLOs has become one of the most complicated aspects of the implementation process. These objectives should build upon each other, meaning students should not be able to "symptomatically" describe the most important learning in which they have been working. This can be seen in Figure 1. The specific objective at various points throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Instructional objectives, or benchmarks, organize the SLO into manageable units across the year. When developing objectives, the focus should be on what teachers want their students to know and be able to do. The outline of each student learning objective has a central focus, one overarching element from which all benchmarks are stemmed. For example, the SLO may focus directly from the performing arts lists, and should clearly relate to the instructional objectives. In addition to the other musical concepts being taught throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Within Georgia’s TKES, there are three evaluation components: (a) Teacher Assessment on Performance Standards (TAPS), (b) Surveys of Instructional Practice, and (c) Student Growth. The purpose of this article is to look at student growth and what it means for music educators. Student growth refers to the amount of progress individual students make between two points in time. First, there are two divisions of the student growth component. Teachers of Tested Subjects (i.e., Math, Language Arts) measure student growth through Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) (GDOE, 2012b). SGP scores are gathered from various standardized tests such as End of Course Tests (EOCTs), AP tests, SATs, etc. Teachers of Non-Tested Subjects (i.e., performing arts, physical education) use Department of Education approved Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) applying district-identified achievement growth benchmarks (GDOE, 2012b). SLOs have been developed because there are no standardized tests from which to gather this student data.

The development of district SLOs has become one of the most complicated aspects of the implementation process. These objectives should build upon each other, meaning students should not be able to "symptomatically" describe the most important learning in which they have been working. This can be seen in Figure 1. The specific objective at various points throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Instructional objectives, or benchmarks, organize the SLO into manageable units across the year. When developing objectives, the focus should be on what teachers want their students to know and be able to do. The outline of each student learning objective has a central focus, one overarching element from which all benchmarks are stemmed. For example, the SLO may focus directly from the performing arts lists, and should clearly relate to the instructional objectives. In addition to the other musical concepts being taught throughout the year, this framework provides a guided pacing for how students should be performing on the specific objective at various points in time.

Written by Dorothy Musselwhite

The SLO Framework

The SLO should be thought of as a framework to guide a specific focus of your teaching. The SLO is comprised of seven components: target population, interval, national standards, state standards, instructional objectives, growth targets/scoring, and rationale. Wesolowski (2014) provides a sample SLO outline in his Documenting Student Learning in Music Performance: A Framework. An example of this can be seen in Figure 1. The target population refers to the specific course being assessed (e.g., Grade 9-12 Advanced Band). The interval dictates the testing and growth window, which could range from a semester to a year. National and State standards should be written directly from the performing arts lists, and should clearly relate to the instructional objectives. In addition, these leaders and administrators have asked teachers to develop measurement tools given very little training. One tool must be used across the district to measure a variety of student growth on a spectrum of ability. This tool, or measure, must be comprised of at least two examination points, a pre-test and a post-test, but may include benchmarks between these endpoints. In addition, the SLO must be rigorous to ensure growth will happen (USDOE, 2012a).
adequately attain the third objective without first mastering the second objective.

Growth targets and scoring organize students into tiers. Pre-test scores determine in which tier a student begins. From there, it is the goal of the student and teacher to promote improvement and progress to reach the next tier level. This way of scoring eliminates the idea that all students should be assessed equally. It is not fair and valid to evaluate in the same way the first chair 11th grade All-State Clarinet player who takes lessons every week and the 9th grade trumpet player who just plays for fun. With this scoring system, a student makes an A by improving to the next tier level. It is important, however, to remind students that although they may score a 45 on the pre-test, this does not indicate a failing grade. It is merely a starting point from where they must grow and improve.

The last section of the SLO is the rationale, which provides the teacher a space to explain weaknesses within the classroom and among individual playing. Using research-based methodology, the teacher must provide evidence that the skills set out in the SLO are important and necessary for the growth of students and the program, and are fundamental to all music making.

**Improvement through Assessment**

The purpose of evaluation is to see what has been learned and to make an overall, final judgment. Assessment, however, can be diagnostic, formative, or summative, and usually involves an ongoing process. Assessment can be defined as "the collection, analysis, interpretation, and application of information about student performance or program effectiveness in order to make educational decisions," (Asmus, 2010). Collection refers to gathering data, finding out what students know and can do. Analysis, interpretation, and application are what the teacher must do with that data once it has been collected. Student performance is what the teacher is most concerned about, specifically how particular students are performing day to day. However, program effectiveness is the concern of the school, district, and state administration.

**Program effectiveness** refers to how an individual’s teaching methods are impacting the students in the classroom, how those students overall are improving on a year to year basis, and how the program is impacting the school and community. Traditionally, program effectiveness has been evaluated and maintained by administrators, but the state is now placing this responsibility in the hands of the teachers. Growth must be documented from diagnostic assessments through summative assessments, and then teachers must analyze that data. Teachers must use various assessments to improve student learning by improving teaching practices, and to provide a source of accountability for the overall program (Asmus, 2010).

There are two goals underscoring the implementation of the SLO frameworks into the music classroom. First, the SLO aims to show improvement among individual students and second, to show improvement in teaching. The pre-test should act as a diagnostic assessment to find students strengths and weaknesses and to guide teaching for the remaining semester or year. Benchmarks or mini-assessments act as formative assessments, given along the way to determine progress. Formative assessments create a cyclical classroom environment in which assessments are given to students, and in turn, the teacher provides feedback back to the students (Guskey, 1988). Student performance informs the teacher of student progress, and subsequently, the teacher must make adjustments to teaching if progress is not adequate. This cycle continues until students’ goals are met. If all students are showing growth, continue with current teaching methods. If mastery is achieved at a faster rate, some students may require enrichment activities. If students are not progressing at an expected rate, the teaching approach must be adjusted for the benefit of the students.
The ultimate goal is to present best teaching practices to students, which will allow the greatest opportunity for growth. Based on these practices, students either will show improvement, or will not show improvement. The job of the teacher is to do everything in his or her power to encourage the former.

Communication

The nature of the performing arts classroom is one of constant feedback. Students are constantly being given instruction on how to sound better, how to fix problems, how to improve intonation, how to blend, how to be expressive, etc. Assessment is already part of every lesson. Now, the SLO is requiring that teachers plan specific assessments ahead of time and show assessment results with numbers and documentation. Teachers must be intentional with the delivery of content and design of assessment to focus on student growth and the needs of the students in the room. However, the majority of what happens day to day in the music classroom already promotes constant student growth. The results from the SLO should be a clear communication of exactly what is happening in each classroom as seen through the data.

During the 2012-2013 school year, Georgia piloted the SLO framework (GDOE, 2012a). There were three phases of development and implementation of the SLOs within Georgia school districts. By the beginning of this pilot study, teachers entered the third and final phase. As can be seen from the pilot study data in Figure 2, performing arts classes showed a number of inconsistencies. The data for Advanced Mixed Chorus show a 100% “exceeds” level. The level of ability of these students may indeed be high, however, this number indicates that all of these students are now facing a very small margin of growth. Now, examine Band (Grade 8) and Beginning Orchestra. These classes show an overwhelming percentage at the level “Did Not Meet.” Looking at the data alone, and taking into account nothing else, it indicates that there is something wrong going on in the classroom.

The data from this pilot study show exactly why it is so important to show what is happening in the classroom through the data. The data for Band (Grade 8) and Beginning Orchestra show over half of the students not meeting criteria. As most music educators look at this chart, it can be assumed that an accurate representation is not being shown. Reasons for such low numbers could include goals that were too difficult, or objectives that were unclear. Teachers, first, must become more involved in the process of SLO development, as no one knows better what students in specific classrooms are able to do. Second, teachers must be advocates for their students and their classrooms, using measures that are going to show administrators and the state exactly what is happening in each class.

**Figure 2. 2012 Georgia TKES SLO Data**

---

**State SLO Data by Course and Rating**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLO Course</th>
<th>Did Not Meet</th>
<th>Meets</th>
<th>Exceeds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Mixed Chorus (9-12)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Placement Music Theory</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Band (Grade 8)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEG CHORUS (Grade 6)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Band I (9-12)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Band (Grade 7)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Choral Ensemble</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Choral Ensemble I</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Chorus (Grade 8)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Chorus (Grade 6)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning Orchestra</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar Techniques (Grade 7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUS/2</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, General (Grade 4)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, General (Grade 5)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music, General (Grade K)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano Techniques (Grade 8)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development of an Assessment Tool

In general, students can be assessed through cognitive-based assessments, which determine the amount of content knowledge mastered, or through performance assessments, which can be accomplished through rating scales or rubrics. Many music educators do not have a fundamental understanding of how to develop and implement these assessment types correctly in the classroom, especially as they apply to the documenting of student learning and growth-related progress (Wesolowski, 2012). In addition, students may frequently be assessed without receiving clear feedback as to their achievement level, methods for improvement, or teacher’s expectations.

How can teachers assess these students in a way that benefits the student and improves teaching? Quality rubrics are one way to tailor assessments to members of the ensemble on a more individual basis. Teacher objectivity can be increased through the use of rubrics, taking out a substantial amount of bias that has been mentioned as a downfall of SLOs. Rubrics begin by developing clearly detailed guidelines for different levels of performance on selected learning goals (e.g., SLO objectives) (Asmus, 2010). When students are assessed using a rubric, they are able to see the full description of their current level of performance. They can also see the descriptions for all other levels, which enables students to understand exactly the expectations for achieving and progressing to the next level (Wesolowski, 2012). For the student growth model, and SLOs in particular, this aspect of feedback on the rubric is essential to motivate students to reach their personal goals.

Wesolowski (2012) discusses the process of creating rubrics. Rubric development should begin with a clear definition of objectives or learning goals for the assessment, which are set by the teacher or, perhaps, the SLO. Then, the teacher must decide the performance criteria for the rubric: what should students be able to do? This should be a short list of three to five items (e.g., intonation control in the upper range). The next step in rubric development involves breaking down performance levels into degrees of proficiency. Using categories, such as (a) beginning, (b) intermediate, (c) proficient, and (d) advanced, the teacher must decide how to describe each level. What are the expectations for each performance level? There should be a flow between all degrees, and each description should be detailed yet concise. The names of the categories may change depending on the ensemble. Being evaluated, and can fluctuate from three to five categories, yet should not exceed five (Gordon, 2002). Last, the teacher should choose a scale to use, assigning points in a logical way. The scoring guide should be simple and consistent. Brian Wesolowski (2012) asserts that developing Rubrics for Music Performance Assessment (2012) provides more detailed guidance in the development of rubrics.

Conclusion

What is available to help make this process easier? At the national level, the implementation of the new Core Arts Standards is leading to new developments in assessment. The Model Cornerstone Assessments (MCAs) are still being developed and are in the pilot stages. These assessments can be accessed through the national website, and house a number of performance rubrics while providing opportunities for standards implementation. In addition to the MCAs, performance assessment rubrics are being developed through research-based studies and can be found online through the Music Education Search System.

Music educators should look at these student growth models, specifically Student Learning Objectives, not as another hurdle, but as a way to improve teaching practices and provide the best opportunity for students. The SLOs should be used to show administrators and state officials that music educators are doing their job, and student growth is happening every year. Communicate and give feedback to students and parents so progress can be encouraged from many directions. When students are not meeting expectations, teachers should change the delivery of content and instruction. By appropriately challenging students in the music classroom, students become more motivated which will provide an environment more likely to witness growth. Evidence should be documented using a well-planned rubric, paired with clearly written objectives and benchmarks. Last, be an advocate for the music program. A basic comprehension of SLO implementation as it applies specifically to music education can lead to better understanding of the students sitting in each classroom, and subsequently, better teaching practices.

References


Dorothy Musselwhite is a Ph.D. candidate in Music Education at the University of Georgia. She serves as a research assistant, instructor of woodwind techniques, and practicum supervisor for instrumental undergraduate Music Education majors. She has previously taught band and chorus at the middle and high school levels in Whittfield and Gwinnett counties.