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## **A LEGISLATIVE PROPOSAL: IMPROVING INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICE WHILE MEASURING EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the proposed legislation is to establish a mechanism through which Colorado school districts may participate in cross-district consortia and access supplemental state resources to support their implementation of certain components of the *Ensuring Quality Instruction through Educator Effectiveness Act* (Educator Effectiveness Act) in ways that simultaneously enhance classroom assessment practice and improve student learning. Specifically, the proposed bill would provide a variety of supports for districts to implement Student Learning Objectives as measures of educators' individually attributable contribution to student learning growth.

### **Background and Legislative Declarations**

The Educator Effectiveness Act requires Colorado school districts to evaluate licensed educators in significant part based on the impact they have on the learning growth of their students. One half (50%) of the annual evaluation rating of every licensed educator working in public school districts must be based on his/her contribution to student learning growth. Measures of student learning growth used for educator evaluation must include the following: at least one individually attributable measure; at least one collectively attributable measure; when available, state summative assessment results; when available, Colorado Growth Model results; and other local measures. The 2013-14 school-year was a "hold-harmless" year for districts to try-out new evaluation approaches. Districts are required to impose consequences related to educator evaluation ratings during the 2014-15 school-year.

Currently, state-provided assessment instruments do not include all content areas touched by licensed professionals. Districts estimate that state-provided measures could be individually attributed to between 30% and 40% of licensed educators (variations exist across districts) based on the content areas and grade levels in which they teach. This is limited further if districts conform to the Colorado Growth Model Technical Advisory Panel recommendation against using Colorado Growth Model results as *individually attributable* measures of educator impact on student learning growth unless "the data is aggregated across least 2 years of Median Growth Percentiles, given the research on their stability over time, taking into consideration major fluctuations in data, trends, and student population served."

The Educator Effectiveness Act allows for districts to purchase or develop additional local assessment instruments to use in measuring educators' individually attributable impact on student learning growth. However, districts have faced double-digit budget reductions over the past two fiscal years and lack the resources to purchase assessment instruments for every untested grade and subject. In addition, most districts have neither the capacity nor the in-house psychometric expertise to develop or evaluate the technical rigor of locally developed or purchased assessments as measures of individually attributable student learning growth or to ensure that assessments and metrics used could withstand legal challenges

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The Educator Effectiveness Act identifies Student Academic Growth Objectives as an alternative for districts to use to measure educators' individually attributable impact on student learning growth that does not require the development/adoption of additional local assessment instruments and the calculation of technically rigorous growth metrics. Student Academic Growth Objectives, or Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) as they are described outside of Colorado, are defined as "a participatory method of setting measurable goals or objectives for a specific (teaching) assignment or class, in a manner aligned with the subject matter taught, and in a manner that allows for the evaluation of the baseline performance of students and the measureable gain in student performance during the course of instruction."

The SLO process of identifying learning goals (aligned with state standards) that reflect the "big ideas" of the course or class, using a body of evidence to measure student learning at the beginning and end of the instructional interval, and monitoring learning and adjusting instruction throughout the interval, promotes educator practice consistent with the first five Teacher Quality Standards. The SLO process also supports standards-based educational practices and establishes a framework for formative assessment practice. A substantial body of research confirms that if implemented appropriately, formative assessment has a significant positive impact on student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Hattie, 2009; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Herman, Osmundson, & Silver, 2010; James et al., 2007; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Rodriguez, 2004; Ruiz-Primo & Furtak, 2006, 2007; Torrance & Pryor, 2001). SLOs have the potential to simultaneously improve classroom practice, the intent of the Educator Effectiveness Act, while measuring educator impact on student learning growth.

Furthermore, SLOs have been documented to have high levels of credibility with educators because they are situated directly within the classroom context, and to be adaptable to all teaching assignments and new state assessments (CTAC, 2013). This adaptability, however, requires districts to implement SLOs in ways that are consistent with their unique context. Districts must incorporate local curriculum and assessment resources, data analysis structures, and mechanisms through which educators share practice and engage in professional dialogue with colleagues and supervisors.

SLOs are a viable alternative to implementing pre- and post-assessment and growth metrics for every content area and grade level; however, they depend upon educators' capacity to select accurate measures and appropriately interpret assessment results. Significant gaps exist in educator capacity in these areas. To implement SLOs effectively in ways that support formative assessment practice and standards-based instructional practices, districts must engage in significant efforts to develop educator and administrator capacity. Without this focus on building educator capacity, SLOs can become nothing more than additional paperwork educators must complete and their supervisors approve.

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Most Colorado districts lack the staff expertise and resources to establish programs of educator capacity-building needed to implement SLOs and dramatically improve classroom assessment practice. For more than a decade, the focus of district assessment offices, in the districts that have them, has been on summative rather than classroom assessment. To implement SLOs appropriately, districts need the following: access to expertise, opportunities to learn with and from one another, and resources to provide professional learning for educators and administrators.

### Proposed Legislative Provisions

The proposed bill would establish a cross-district SLO Consortium. It would create incentives for districts to work collaboratively, (e.g. sharing practices, resources, lessons learned) and would fund summer sessions in 2014 and 2015 to bring districts together to participate in professional learning, identify the critical components of SLOs to ensure they appropriately measure educator impact on student learning growth, and to share experiences as SLOs are implemented across a variety of district contexts.

It would charge the Colorado Department of Education with providing information about service providers available to help schools districts implement SLOs, adapt the existing state data-bank to serve as a repository for SLO-related resources, and establish a process for reviewing and vetting those resources.

The proposed bill would also establish a fund and mechanism for districts to apply for state funding to implement SLOs for educator evaluation. To receive funding, districts would:

- Provide a plan that describes how they will build educator and administrative leadership capacity through their implementation of SLOs in a way that simultaneously enhances classroom assessment, formative assessment practice, and standards-based instruction, and has an impact on student learning growth.
- Justify their need for this support (not supplanting other funds already available).
- Agree to utilize, as appropriate, online assessment literacy resources being developed by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) when they are available.
- Contribute to the state data bank of resources established through Colorado's Race-to-the-Top initiative.
- Agree to participate in cross-district collaborative efforts to learn together about implementing SLOs.
- Agree to participate in an external evaluation of their efforts.

Finally, it would establish and fund an external formative and summative evaluation of the implementation of district plans, the quality of their SLO processes, associated improvements in instruction/assessment practice, and the impact on student learning growth.

