Supplemental Student Learning Objective Development Guide: Teachers of Gifted Students

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Teachers of Gifted Students

All students—not only those performing at or below proficiency—deserve high-quality instruction. Teachers of gifted students have both the opportunity and the challenge of providing rigorous instruction to students "who perform or show potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared to others for their age, experience, or environment" (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2008, p. 1). To provide these students with challenging and engaging instruction, teachers of gifted students need to identify student strengths and weaknesses and tailor instruction accordingly. Student learning objectives (SLOs) provide a structure for systematically identifying strengths and weaknesses through data analysis, developing goals, and then using those goals to inform instruction.

Although SLOs can be a useful way of measuring student growth, teachers of gifted students may face unique challenges when writing SLOs. Programming for gifted students can vary greatly based on district resources and student needs. Some courses may rely on acceleration, and others may use enrichment. Some teachers may interact with an entire class of gifted and high-performing students, and other teachers may have a small subgroup of students within a class of varying ability levels. As a result, SLOs that include gifted students can vary. In addition, selecting appropriate assessments can be challenging. Gifted students often grow faster intellectually than they grow physically, emotionally, or socially; generally, they are high performing. As a result, students may not be able to show growth on grade-level assessments, and small class sizes may further complicate measuring student growth. Given these challenges, this guide provides considerations, guiding questions, strategies, and SLO examples for districts as they develop policies and supports for teachers of gifted students.

This guide is one of a series of five supplemental guides provided for local education agencies and teachers of specialty groups of students to support the implementation of SLOs.

Developmental guides are provided for the following teacher groups:

- Teachers of students with disabilities
- Teachers of English language learners (ELLs)
- Teachers of preschool programs and kindergarten
- Teachers of career and technical education courses
- Teachers of gifted students

Considerations

Teachers of gifted students experience specific contextual factors that can influence their ability to measure student growth. This section describes some of these factors and identifies specific considerations associated with measuring student growth for gifted students. The considerations are organized according to the sections of the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Template Checklist for Writing and Approving Student Learning Objectives.

Student Population

- **Pull-out or resource teachers who work with small class sizes may need to combine classes within an SLO.** If your class size is smaller or close to the ODE minimum number of students per *Business Rules for Student Growth Measures*, combine multiple classes within one SLO. Including more students in an SLO reduces the potential for measurement error.

- **Attend to the asynchronous development of gifted students.** Gifted students tend to develop faster intellectually than physically, emotionally, or socially. In addition, some gifted students have heightened sensitivity to expectations and feelings, demonstrate perfectionism, or hold concerns about societal problems. As you plan your SLO, consider whether some or all students will need additional supports in order to succeed academically (Clark, 2008; Delisle & Galbraith, 2002; Silverman, 2007).

- **Consider the diverse needs of your gifted students.** Even if you teach a class of all gifted students, the strengths and needs of individual students will vary. Students may struggle with a disability, be ELLs, face negative social pressures, or lack access to supports and resources (Futrell, 2004; Olszewski-Kubulius, 2003; Olszewski-Kubilius & Clarenbach, 2012; Olszewski-Kubulius & Thompson, 2010).

  - What accommodations or modifications will twice-exceptional students—students who are identified both as gifted and as having disabilities—need in order to demonstrate their full potential?

  - What additional resources, counseling, or supports will students from low-income or minority backgrounds need in order to demonstrate their full potential?

  - How will you support your gifted ELLs?

  - Are additional efforts needed to ensure that the curriculum is culturally and linguistically responsive to your student population?

Program Delivery Models for Gifted Programs

Resource room pull-out. The gifted student is "assigned to a class with a special curricular focus outside the regular classroom" for part of the school week (VanTassel-Baska & Reis, 2006, p. 1).

Within the regular classroom. The student identified as gifted receives differentiated instruction from the classroom teacher who receives high quality professional development and on-going support from an educator with gifted endorsement.

Co-teaching model. The gifted student receives instruction from the gifted intervention specialist in the regular classroom.

Separate classes. The gifted student attends one or more special classes such as an honors, International Baccalaureate, or Advanced Placement (AP) or arts course targeted for gifted and/or above-average learners.

Self-contained classrooms. The gifted student is assigned to a class in which the gifted intervention specialist is the teacher of record. The class is comprised of all gifted students.

Ohio Department of Education. (2008). *The Operating Standards for Identifying and Serving Gifted Students* https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Other-Resources/Gifted-Education/Rules-Regulations-and-Policies-for-Gifted-Educatio/Operating-Standards-for-Identifying-and-serving-Gifted-Students.pdf.aspx

Standards and Content

SLOs must align with appropriate content standards. Separate content standards do not exist for gifted students. Therefore, the SLO should be aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards. The Ohio grade level standards can be enhanced for gifted students based on examples found at the following link: http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Special-Education/Diverse-Learners/Instructional-Resources-for-Teachers-of-Diverse-Le In the event that there are no Ohio Learning Standards for the course, the SLO will align to standards put forth by national organizations. Although the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) Gifted Programming Standards can be extremely useful when planning and evaluating gifted programs, they are not content standards and should not be used in the

"Standards and Content" portion of the SLO. The NAGC does provide guidance in enhancing standards for gifted in the areas of ELA, mathematics and science.

- **The content of SLOs may vary greatly based on the type of programming gifted students receive.** When writing the SLO, tailor the content of the SLO to be based on the programming structure and the content addressed in instruction. The SLO may focus on above-level content standards if the student receives acceleration. For example, if a Grade 5 honors mathematics class covers Grade 6 mathematics standards, then the teacher's SLO should include Grade 6 content standards. An SLO for gifted students in an enrichment pull-out class may use on-grade-level standards, but the content focus of the SLO may be different from a general education SLO.

- **SLOs should not focus on attainment of written education plans (WEPs).** The SLO should include multiple students and focus on critical skills and content. It should not focus narrowly on individual students' WEP goals. As with individualized education program goals, WEP goals are unique to individual students and may be too narrowly focused. SLOs should be written for a class or subgroup of students. That said, the written education plan may be a source of baseline and trend data and student information. Information found in the WEP goals includes information about the gifted student's area(s) of identification, student interest and learning styles, and present levels of academic and social or emotional functioning—all of which can be included in the baseline and trend data or student population components of the SLO.

Instruction

- **Instruction for gifted students should be differentiated in one or more of the following ways:**

  - Providing access to appropriately advanced curriculum content, including replacement or extension of the regular curriculum;
  - Modifying the learning process to provide an appropriate level of challenge, including the use of strategies for curriculum compacting; and,
  - Modifying or replacing assignments and projects with alternatives based on the student's needs and abilities.

Interval of Instruction

- **Provide a detailed description of the interval of instruction.** Because programming models vary, carefully consider and describe how the length of time spent will impact students' potential growth. Do you see students for only a few hours each week? Do you see them daily? Providing detailed information about the length of the course and the time spent with students will help SLO reviewers be more informed about whether the targets you set for students are appropriate.

Assessments

- **SLOs should include rigorous assessments that will allow gifted students to show growth.** Because students often are already proficient in basic content, assessments should extend beyond basic recollection of knowledge or facts and emphasize high-level thinking and processing skills (VanTassel-Baska, 2014). Assessments should include questions with the appropriate depth of knowledge for gifted students. Per Ohio guidance, assessments used in SLOs must have stretch, meaning that they can capture accurately the performance of the lowest and highest performing students included in the SLO. To have sufficient stretch, an assessment must contain questions that vary in difficulty. The assessment should contain both basic and advanced knowledge and skill questions so that both low-performing and high-performing students can demonstrate growth. To do this, consider questions for a particular standard at different depths of knowledge. If for some reason gifted students perform higher than expected on the preassessment, the postassessment may need to include extension questions.

- **Because gifted students are often high performing, measuring the student growth of these students and determining rigorous yet realistic goals for these students can be challenging.** That said, "simply because it is not easy to assess the growth of gifted students does not excuse educators from doing so" (Ryser & Rambo-Hernandez, 2014, p. 21). Instead, consider the benefits and drawbacks of each assessment type and strategically choose assessments based on your context. See Table 1 for more detailed information.

Table 1. Strengths and Limitations of Using Various Assessment Types With Gifted Students

	Definition	Examples	Benefits	Limitations	Suggestions
On-Grade-Level Assessments	Standards-based assessments that measure skills and content defined for each grade level	▪ State Assessments	▪ On-grade-level assessments are already administered to students in a general education classroom.	▪ Assessments often contain only a handful of items that challenge gifted students.[a] ▪ Gifted students' scores may contain greater measurement error than average-performing students.[b] ▪ When a student's abilities exceed the knowledge and skills captured on the test, ceiling effects may occur, and the student's score may not reflect the student's true ability or growth.[c]	Computer-adaptive and vertically aligned assessments may be more likely to capture student growth than other standardized assessments.[b]
Above-Level or Off-Level Assessments	Assessments originally designed or intended for use with students at a higher grade level	Talent searches often use the following above-level tests with students for the purposes of identification and instructional planning: ▪ School and College Ability Test (SCAT) ▪ SAT ▪ ACT ▪ ASPIRE ▪ Spatial Test Battery[d]	▪ Above-level assessment results may provide richer baseline information about students' strengths and weaknesses than on-grade-level testing and therefore can help inform instructional planning and programming.[a] ▪ Above-level assessments can better capture students' advanced levels of knowledge and strong reasoning abilities.[a]	▪ Researchers disagree whether a sufficient number of psychometric studies of above-level testing have been conducted.[e] ▪ Interpretation of results can be difficult for teachers and parents.[a] ▪ Above-level testing can create uneasiness and concern among students and parents who have come to expect high raw scores and excellent percentile ranks.[a]	Recognize the limitations of above-level assessments. If using above-level assessments, consider informing parents and students before students take the assessment.

	Definition	Examples	Benefits	Limitations	Suggestions
Performance Assessments	Assessments requiring students to construct an answer, produce a product, or perform an activity[f]	The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented developed performance tasks in multiple and interdisciplinary subjects. However, these have not been aligned formally to Ohio's Learning Standards. The Mathematics Assessment Project site includes free access to sample middle school and high school performance tasks aligned to Ohio's Learning Standards in mathematics and categorizes the tasks into three levels: novice, apprentice, and expert.	▪ Performance assessments can allow gifted students to demonstrate their full capability in a domain of knowledge. ▪ These assessments provide gifted students an opportunity to demonstrate increased depth and complexity of understanding of the same content standards taught to general education students. ▪ Performance tasks often provide opportunities for students to apply learning to real-world scenarios.	▪ Performance assessments can be time consuming to administer. ▪ Scoring assessments consistently can be challenging and often requires training and professional judgment.	Performance assessments should be appropriately challenging, be written in an open-ended format, and require articulation of thinking.[g] Assessments should be accompanied by well-written rubrics or criteria for scoring.

	Definition	Examples	Benefits	Limitations	Suggestions
Capstone Projects	Culminating performance tasks or projects that require students to apply their knowledge and think critically, solve problems, and develop skills[h]	▪ Internships ▪ Competing scientific studies ▪ Creating a business plan ▪ Writing a final report ▪ Preparing a final presentation	▪ Capstone projects can allow gifted students to demonstrate greater capability in a domain of knowledge. ▪ Capstone projects provide gifted students an additional opportunity to demonstrate increased depth and complexity of understanding of the same content standards taught to general education students. ▪ Capstone projects can be used as extension assessments. ▪ Performance tasks often provide opportunities for students to apply learning to real-world scenarios.	▪ Finding or interpreting baseline data will be challenging because other assessments may not have assessed the same skills or content or may not have done so in a similar format.	Capstone projects should reflect rigorous academic standards and be accompanied by well-written rubrics or criteria for grading.
Portfolios	A purposeful collection of student work, often with personal commentary or self-analysis, that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in an area.[i]	Teachers in Memphis have created two portfolio models and continue to create more, for measuring student growth that have been adopted by the Tennessee Department of Education: Fine Arts Portfolio Model World Languages Portfolio Model	Portfolios document change over time. Portfolios can emphasize depth over breadth.[j]	Scoring consistently is challenging, especially if each portfolio includes different performance tasks (e.g., one student includes a persuasive essay and the other student includes an expository essay).[k] Developing portfolios requires significant time from the teacher to develop materials, meet with students and small groups, review student work, and help students collect work.	Set common rubrics and task expectations. Portfolios with common task expectations tend to have higher rates of scoring consistency.

[a] Thomson & Olszewski-Kubulius, 2014

[b] McCoach, Rambo, & Welsh, 2012; Ryser & Rambo-Hernandez, 2014

[c] Ceiling effects are present when students receive the highest possible test score but that score does not reflect the student's true ability.

[d] Thomson & Olszewski-Kubilius, 2014; Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth, 2014

[e] Thomson & Olszewski-Kubulius, 2014; Warne, 2012, 2014

[f] Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010

[g] VanTassel-Baska, 2014

[h] Great Schools Partnership, 2014

[i] Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Stecher, 2010

[j] Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991

[k] Stecher, 2010

Growth Targets

- Growth expectations for gifted students can vary on the basis of students' starting places and contextual factors that may affect growth.

  - **Consider the needs of ELLs.** As Castellano (2002) notes, "One does not need to speak English in order to be gifted or academically talented" (p. 96). Goal setting and instruction should focus on high-level thinking skills as well as on students' strengths, interests, and cultures (Bianco & Harris, 2014).

  - **Consider the unique needs of twice-exceptional students.** As previously noted, students with twice-exceptional status are those identified as having "giftedness as measured by high cognitive abilities or strong distinctive abilities/talents, existing alongside processing of other disabilities, which moderates/limits expression of the high abilities" (McCallum et al., 2013, p. 209). These students' growth patterns might not mirror growth patterns of other students with giftedness or growth patterns of other students with disabilities. Teachers should avoid looking at twice-exceptional students' giftedness and disability in isolation because each affects the other (Willard-Holt & Morrison, 2013).

- In addition, growth expectations can vary greatly by assessment type.

  - **On-grade-level testing.** Students with higher preassessment scores may tend to show less growth than their lower performing peers; potential reasons may include measurement issues or problems with instruction or curriculum not meeting the needs of these students (McCoach et al., 2012).

  - **Above-level testing.** Warne (2014) recently found that gifted students taking above-level assessments showed more growth than on-level peers on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Iowa Tests of Educational Development. Therefore, if using above-level tests, keep in mind that gifted learners taking above-level tests may show more growth than on-level peers when setting growth targets (Warne, 2014).

  - **Capstone projects.** Because these tasks tend to be culminating events, one challenge with using capstone projects is that often teachers will not have a similar source of preassessment data to use when setting growth targets. However, capstone projects may work well as supplemental assessments when gifted students score unexpectedly high on a preassessment. For example, on a teacher's SLO, gifted students might be expected to reach a minimum score on a postassessment but also reach a certain threshold on the capstone project.

Guiding Questions for Local Education Agencies and Coordinators of Gifted Programming

- **Identify the various gifted programming models used in the district.** The district may serve gifted students in a variety of ways within the same district—in general education classrooms, co-teaching, pull-out settings, and honors or AP classes. It is important to identify the various configurations and then determine whether guidelines are needed to increase comparability. For example, consider the following sample questions:

  - Will you require or recommend that teachers write SLOs focused specifically on gifted subgroups of students?

  - Will you require or recommend that teachers of honors or AP classes write an SLO on one of these classes?

  - Will you require gifted specialists or gifted pull-out teachers to write a team SLO with the general education teacher?

- **Consider the professional learning needs of SLO teams, evaluators, and administrators.** Even experienced educators can have misconceptions or misunderstandings about what it means to be gifted. Will you provide SLO teams, evaluators, and administrators with professional learning opportunities to help them be better equipped to assess the quality of an SLO that includes gifted students?

- **Determine assessment guidelines for teachers of gifted students.** Based on the strengths and limitations of various assessment types highlighted in this document, are there particular assessment types that you will require, recommend, or prohibit?

- **Decide how you will communicate requirements, guidelines, and recommendations to teachers.** Teachers should receive the same information directly from the source, such as through a newsletter or training.

Strategies

The following strategies present various approaches to writing SLOs based on the context in which the teacher works.

Strategy 1: Collaborate when writing SLOs for gifted students. Writing a team SLO provides teachers an opportunity to collaborate and focus on the learning needs of gifted students. For example, a general educator and gifted pull-out teacher could write an SLO focused on the gifted students within the general educator's class. After analyzing data and content standards together, the two teachers would commit to working with gifted students on a particular area of need in both classroom settings, such as argument writing. The teachers would write the SLO together

and share the same targets for the gifted students. Another option is to work together but still write separate SLOs. For example, if two teachers identify reasoning and argument writing as areas in need of improvement, the general education teacher might focus on argument writing, but the gifted specialist might focus the SLO on logic, fallacies, and inductive and deductive reasoning.

Teachers working with gifted students across grade levels also could collaborate on writing SLOs. This strategy helps ensure that SLOs are vertically aligned and build from year to year. It also helps ensure that expectations for students are consistent across grades. For example, teachers of honors and AP social studies courses might collaborate at the beginning of the year to ensure that freshman and sophomore students currently in honors courses will be ready for AP courses by the time they reach junior and senior years.

Strategy 2: Write tiered or individualized targets. Given the diverse strengths and needs of gifted students, consider writing tiered or individualized targets. This approach to growth targets recognizes that, although all students should be expected to show growth, it may not be developmentally appropriate to expect all students to demonstrate the same growth. Writing tiered or individualized targets is one way to help ensure that each student's target is rigorous yet attainable.

Strategy 3: Leverage resources to determine appropriate growth. When you are unsure of a target's appropriateness, consult with the students' former teachers, the gifted specialist or coordinator, and academic counselors. Unfortunately, assessment-specific research on how much growth to expect from gifted students is limited. However, you can use data from prior years (both from current students and former students) to estimate growth trajectories and inform the goals you set for students.

Strategy 4: Use extension questions as needed. Ideally, teachers will select an assessment with enough stretch for gifted students; however, if you find that students scored high on a preassessment, consider using extension questions or an additional postassessment that asks students to demonstrate increased depth of understanding on grade-level content standards. Extension questions or assessments can address greater depth and complexity on grade-level content standards, extend beyond grade-level standards, or do both; the standards used and depth of knowledge of questions should be based on whether you provided students with enrichment, acceleration, or a combination of the two. Although more likely to be needed in a general education classroom, extension questions can be used by all teachers in all contexts as needed.

Strategy 5: Write an SLO focused on gifted students. A pull-out teacher who works with six or more gifted students will have to write an SLO focused on gifted students, but other teachers also can write an SLO focused on gifted students. This targeted SLO can focus on an area of need for this population of students, either because students need to improve in this area or because students need to be challenged more in this area. For example, if a Grade 4 teacher provides enrichment activities to challenge students to improve their persuasive writing within the general education classroom, the teacher might focus an SLO on persuasive writing standards for gifted students.

Strategy 6: Write an SLO based on the skills addressed through an enrichment course.
Pull-out specialists for gifted students who teach content separate from the general education teacher should consider writing an SLO based on the key skills targeted during sessions. For example, a gifted specialist who pulls students out of the classroom and teaches an extended unit on Greek and Roman mythology will likely need to write an SLO focused on the English language arts standards addressed through this extended unit.

Strategy 7: Use the standards that correspond to class content. Teachers who provide acceleration to gifted students, such as in an honors or AP class, should write an SLO based on the content taught and standards addressed in that course. For example, an eighth-grade honors course that follows the ninth-grade curriculum should write the SLO based on the Ohio Learning Standards for ninth grade and select an appropriate assessment that aligns to those standards. The spiraling design of the standards makes this process easier for teachers to implement.

Strategy 8: Write an SLO with tiered growth targets that includes multiple classes. When class sizes are small, teachers should consider including multiple classes within the same SLO. For example, if a pull-out teacher works with five third graders on Mondays and eight fourth graders on Tuesdays, and the teacher works on critical-thinking skills with both groups, then the teacher should write an SLO focused on critical thinking that includes both groups. This increases the number of students included on the SLO. The teacher can differentiate the targets as needed based on student needs.

Gifted Education Sample SLOs

Grades 3–6 SLO on Critical Thinking: This SLO focuses on critical thinking for a gifted pull-out situation.

Grades 3–5 SLO on Research Skills: This SLO focuses on research skills of students in a gifted resource room pull-out program.

AP Environmental Science: This SLO is written for an AP class. This SLO does not specify whether any students have been identified as gifted in areas relevant to this course, but it provides an example of an SLO written for an accelerated course of study.

AP Literature and Composition: This SLO is also written for an AP class. This SLO does not specify whether any students have been identified as gifted in areas relevant to this course, but it provides an example of an SLO written for an accelerated course of study.

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